



VARIANT

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VARIANT is a magazine of cross-currents in culture: art practice, critical activity, imaginative ideas, challenging tendencies. We are a charitable non-profit distributing organisation and function with the assistance of public grants, sales, subscriptions and advertising. We welcome contributions in the form of news, previews, articles, interviews, polemical pieces, and artists pages. Contributors are paid at our usual rates (contact the editor for guidelines).

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It has been a year since we published last. Although Variant's appearance has always been intermittent, the last issue was something of a trial run for a new format and design. With this new issue we can now fulfil our aim of being a quarterly with the increased backing of public funds. We will continue to reassess the contents and refine the design - radical proclamations and good ideas should not equate with bad production standards, given the will and the working budget.

It is not alarmist to say that this is a difficult period for a magazine or any other cultural initiative to not only try and sustain themselves and broaden their base, but also to develop. Outlets are decreasing: small bookshops dealing with challenging and unfamiliar material are finding it hard to survive in the marketplace, and galleries are faced with tighter budgets, which affects their display of material and also their willingness to advertise their services. The details will be wearisome to most readers.

Despite great pressures to conform, the present anarchy throws up idealism, but also a more aggressive realism in finding a way out of the current malaise. Shaking up complacency and providing a forum for the development of new strategies of cultural empowerment are as much the role of magazines as the areas they report upon. For those who prefer pose over position, fashion over critique, and a multitude of diversion over the present, it is not so cool to talk of independent media or of an alternative culture. These should not equate with cynical notions of a limp alternativism, however, but in making inroads, breaking down the power of the centre and of cultural hegemony so that other areas can grow, and with it the voices of those participating. There is no room for complacency or indifference: to evaluate that which you are partisan to means embracing conflicting viewpoints as well.

We hope that this issue goes some way to mapping out some of the terrain where traditional categories in the arts are being questioned. We hope that the magazine will continue to preserve the imaginative and the critical in a diversity of expressions, but also challenge their tendency to burn-out, sell-out and ossify.

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ews +

UNION OF SCOTTISH ART WORKERS

'Membership of the USAW is open to practising visual artists and visual artworkers in Scotland.'

Members should support the work of USAW'

These are the criterion of eligibility for the **Union of Scottish Artworkers** which held its inaugural meeting in Glasgow School of Art on 19th June 1991. The occasion was spirited:

'Scotland will have a visual arts culture whether it likes it or not' and chaired by the inimitable **Owen Dudley Edwards**. The opening address, a truly remarkable performance by **Richard Demarco**, encompassed Hungary (where Demarco plans to open a new gallery), Scotland, the EC, himself, the Scottish Arts Council, the Edinburgh Festival, the Ian McCulloch wall hangings and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, in one fell swoop. More glorious moments followed and the room positively breathed with consensus as the lion lay down with the lamb: *'I cannot recommend him more highly'* (**Andrew Brown** of Demarco). You came, you saw,

That being said the mood was orderly and business like.

Passed at this meeting were draft aims and objectives which stated that USAW has been founded to represent the interests of individuals working in the visual arts in Scotland by:

1 Protecting the rights of its members through establishing exhibiting rights for practising artists and strengthening conditions of employment for art workers.

2 Facilitating communication with funding bodies.

3 Creating a strong visual arts lobby in Scotland

4 Establishing a forum for discussion amongst members

5 Securing representation on relevant committees and panels of bodies funding the visual arts in Scotland.

6 Establishing a professional code of practice within the visual arts in Scotland.

Sixteen people were elected onto the committee on the understanding that this number would be reduced to nine at a later stage. Nominated were: **Dawson Murray**, artist; **Nicola White**, arts administrator; **Oladele Bamgboye**, artist; **Gloria Chalmers**, Director of Portfolio Gallery/Editor Portfolio magazine; **Billy**

Clark, artist; **Andrew Brown**, Director of 369 gallery; **Richard Demarco**, Director of Demarco Gallery; **Rose Frain**, artist; **Gillian McFarland**, Community artist; **Nathan Coley**, artist; **Liz Murray**, artist; **Hilary Robinson**, Editor of Alba magazine; **Rosalie Summer-ton**, Community artist; **Diana Sykes**, Director of Crawford Arts Centre; **John Whiteman**, Director of Glasgow School of Art; **Arthur Watson**, Director of Peacock Printmakers; **Nigel Mullan**, Secretary of Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop.

Noting the preponderance of arts administrators, it was decided that the final committee should favour artists.

Four meetings were convened in the subsequent six weeks. A main priority is to develop a strong and broad grass-roots membership across Scotland. To this end networks have been established in readiness for mailings in late Autumn. Research is underway on suitable constitutions; sources of funding beyond membership fees are being considered. The need for sound legal and financial advice is also recognised.

The impetus for USAW developed out of the **Save Our Galleries Campaign** (in response to the Fruitmarket Gallery and 369 Gallery closures). While some Committee members overlap,



USAW is stressing the development of positive codes of practice and positive models for individuals in the workplace. An objective is to open up channels of communication: the **SAC** (Scottish Arts Council) is consulting the **NAA** (National Artists Association) about artists contracts; **VAGA** (Visual Arts & Galleries Association) is in receipt of an **ACGB** (Arts Council of Great Britain) grant to research policy. **ACAS** (Advisory Council for the Arts in Scotland) has approached USAW, while the **Welsh Arts Council** has requested information and **The British Council** have offered support.

While USAW is reluctant to take on cases before being properly constituted, a press release has nonetheless been issued about the removal of the **Ian McCulloch** hangings from the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, and a letter sent to the Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts asking for their position on the matter (**Pat Lally**, Leader of Glasgow District Council and the man responsible for the order to remove the hangings, is an Honorary Member). A letter of support was sent to **Hugh Collins**, sculptor on hunger strike in Shotts Prison, while a sub-committee will respond to the **National Arts Strategy** and research on the relationship between subsidized organisations and Boards of Directors is ongoing.

A broad and widely-based initiative, the setting up of USAW comes at an important time of restructuring in the arts: it also represents the most constructive attempt so far to establish the basis of an art workers union in Scotland.

Subscriptions are £15 waged and £7 unwaged, and forms are available from:

Diana Sykes
Crawford Arts Centre
93 North Street
St Andrews KY16 9AL
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Fiona Byrne-Sutton



EVERY PENNY ON THE PEOPLE

There is an Ivor Cutler story about a man who puts a drawing of a carrot in front of his donkey because he doesn't want to waste a real one. After a few alterations to the rather bad sketch, which he prepares behind the donkey's back, it eventually accepts it and begins to pull the cart. There's a political metaphor here: one of the real jobs that politicians are successful at is in 'deceiving the public for their own good'. For a government to pursue a strategy they need the co-operation and involvement of ideological institutions who are willing to share their interests. They must explain the current issues of the day in terms that they will win whatever the facts might be. For some, this much sometimes hardly needs stating but for others unconsciously on the receiving end, it is not stated often enough.

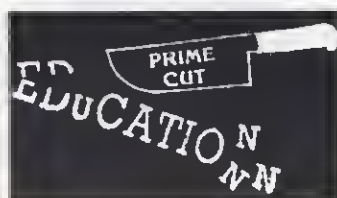
The massive cuts in budgets and expenditure now in the process of implementation by **Strathclyde** and **Lothian Regional Councils** are in bitter contrast to the much publicised image of themselves as caring for the 'quality of life' of

their citizens. The crisis in Local Authority funding is set against a background of mounting attacks on public services by the Conservative Government. Yet these cuts have been voluntarily imposed by Labour groups who seem resigned to manage the crisis while hoping the Government will change its mind. This *de facto* collusion and co-operation with the Government may be helping their election chances but it is also aiding the destruction of the National Health Service, Comprehensive Education and Local Authority Services.

'The refusal of the Trade Union and Labour Movement to mount an effective campaign against the Government has left them in the position of implementing their policies. This has the double edged impact of legitimising these attacks and suppressing the ability of workers to organise themselves in opposition to the Government'.

Lothian Anti-Cuts Broadsheet, June 1991

Lothian Regional Council decided that £20 million would be cut



DEFY



AUTHORITY

from their programme to avoid capping and promptly blamed the Poll-Tax non-payers for the entire situation. Then, came a further round of cuts of £18 million, in which the voluntary sector's 'necessary sacrifice' was to be £350,000 which involved the withdrawal of all funding from the **Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre** and the **Citizens Rights Office**. Both groups had long annoyed the Labour Group by daring to give advice on non-payment of the Poll-Tax and as such their closures were strategic in an attempt to silence opposition. Indeed since the closure of the Citizens Rights Office is not due to lack of funds (it is to be remodelled as a more impersonal advice shop) it is more likely - as speculation suggests - that its closure has come about as the result of a personal dislike of the place by the Convenor of Social Work. Opposition grew using the Unemployed Workers Centre as a base and there is now a mounting campaign against the cuts which seeks to increase public awareness of their disastrous implications for both service workers and users. By their very nature - and paradoxically - the cuts offer up a potentially broad power base for oppositional groups: a coalition of workers and community activists, trade unionists and community groups. The Lothian Labour Group's response to the campaign was to backtrack on previous public statements, because they realised that they were in serious danger of alienating a sizeable proportion of potential voters in not only the **Nalگو** workforce but the general public. Unlike the Labour Group in Glasgow, Lothian hold marginal seats. They eventually produced their own broadsheet mirroring the one produced by the anti-cuts campaign which they distributed at various union meetings. While they were making people redundant and planning further cuts it states that: 'Labour believes it is both morally wrong and economic folly, to add to Lothian's dole queues'.

The Labour Group in Glasgow seek to 'manage capitalism' and the present crisis in a more astute way than their counterparts in Lothian through the mediation of culture. In **1990**, the District Council's response to questions as to why the money spent on culture could not be spent or directed into forms which alleviated social hardship (making life better for people) was, not surprisingly, a bureaucratic one - stating that the money had been raised on the basis of its strict allocation to arts and culture and that their hands were tied on the matter. Despite this, **Pat Lally** (of Glasgow District Council) can argue that all cultural expenditure - every penny in fact - is spent improving the quality of people's lives in the full knowledge that the Labour Group in Strathclyde Regional Council are implementing £70 million of cuts in Social Services. Yet the facts of the initial savings of £1.3 million in the Urban Aid budget show that the Arts and Social Services are inextricably linked, because they have resulted in the closure/termination of community arts centres, arts workshops, projects and services such as the provision for pre-five handicapped children, truancy and solvent abuse projects and so on. These are points where real life and culture merge unglamorously but the Labour Group seem to perceive their value as nil.

It seems that the rigid demarcation of funding or it's subsequent withdrawal is part of an overall strategy by the Labour Group to promote a form of culture which concords with their remit of presenting good P.R. to businessmen. The Labour Group are yet again out-flanked by the Right who are manipulating them through offering funding for eco-

nomic development, only to the extent that programmes concur with the drive of Conservative policies. Pat Lally responded to this on Scottish Television:

'The City of Culture expenditure, which amounted to around £15 million, we got £500,000 from Central Government, that was the total contribution from the Minister of Arts and Libraries South of the Border. We didn't get a tisser from the Scottish Office. The building of the Concert Hall - £13 million - we didn't get a penny from Central Government. So I don't know where this rescue operation that's been referred to on the city by eminent Conservatives has taken place... Because I can only say that the money isn't reaching me'.

Night Flyte, 4/7/91.

The Council's attitude towards the running of culture in the city has come in for criticism from some strange quarters, which nevertheless sheds some light on Lally's response. In particular it was reported in the press that Glasgow Tory Group Leader **John Young** has written to the Scottish Office asking them to 'Probe the status of Local Authority run companies'. This came after the District Council's decision to join with the Regional Council to buy out the Scottish Development Agency's (SDA) shareholding in the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre. The Scottish Office had made 'special provision' to lend £5 million towards the buy-out deal. The whole package will use public money to clear the debt of the operating company and put both Councils in complete control of the Centre. The District Council's reply to John Young - through the then Spokesman **Danny Crawford** - was that 'his government' had told the SDA to divest itself of assets. Young's criticisms ranged over the whole notion of Local Authority run companies such as **Glasgow Concert Hall Enterprises Ltd.**, **City Windows Ltd.**, and now the **Exhibition Centre Company**. According to Young, the Council ran these



companies 'at arms length from the mainstream Council process. The Labour Administration appointed its own Councillors as Directors' He also states that 'this appears to be some form of undercover local government power operating in a closet with no accountability to the electorate'. (Glasgow Herald, April 1991)

The Labour Group have internalised right wing policies within their administrative structure in such a way that any overt coercion from the Parliamentary Right need hardly take place. This has been noted as another dismal chapter in the history of local politics in the city.

During 1990, one of the main images used to promote the creation of an enterprise culture in Glasgow, was the re-naming of a part of the city as the *Merchant City*, named after the Merchants who, through their success in the Tobacco industry gave their names to the streets in that part of town. It is a peculiar memory to invoke. The Merchants in the second half of the 18th Century gained their wealth through both direct trading and the exploitation of slaves on their plantations in America, working to death over 10,000 people a year. The Council decided to enshrine their memory as a feature of the new Glasgow and donned the mantle of civic pride in the merchant class of another boom era in the city's history which on this occasion was funded by the British Empire's enslavement and exploitation of whole nations and cultures. With this Victorian Merchant Class, Glasgow became the second city of the Empire. Those City Fathers also invested in art and culture to celebrate their wealth and to ameliorate the rise of Socialism among the population of the city. The recent demonstrations of Anti-War (Gulf) and Anti-Poll Tax supporters are the only recent developments of the Socialist street tradition.

The District Council's **Arts and Culture Committee** (a sub-committee

made up of Baillies and Councillors) bid for the nomination of the Arts Council of Great Britain's **Arts 2000 Project** is just the more recent attempt to revamp an already fading and illusory image of the city. The proposal, written by **Julian Spalding** (Director, Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries), **John Whiteman** (Director, Glasgow School of Art), **Chris Carrell** (Director, Third Eye Centre), seems to open with an argument which would confirm suspicions that the arts are indeed being used as a replacement and deflection for the more pressing issues of the day, such as the cuts in Social Services. They state:

'It is arguable that Glasgow's revival (in 1980 it was still one of the most deprived cities in Europe, in 1990 it was Cultural Capital) was founded on the building of an art gallery - the Burrell. Glasgow has learned to have faith in the arts'.

The project - like many applications for funding - is basically a marketing plan, containing little mention of what will actually take place on an artistic level. It is wholly reliant on what organisations will provide by their existing plans. The object of the proposal is to totally subsume all activities within its colonising image and develop them as 'a coherent plan in consultation with the Glasgow District Council's Public Relations Department and the Greater Glasgow Tourist Board'.

It carefully avoids any mention of spectres such as **Glasgow's Glasgow** and that particular project's bankruptcy: yet it still describes its administrative structure as being based on the 'proven model' of both the Garden Festival and the Year of Culture. This structure will consist of the setting up of co-ordination committees, research and development offices and specialised marketing offices at a cost of £1.25 million, the total cost of the project being £6.3 million. The virtues of the goal of improving the 'quality of people's lives through spending millions

marketing the arts fades in the light of £70 million cuts in real services and the possibility that they may not even exist as a reality by the year 2000. But this perception does not seem to enter the agenda of the District Council. The proposal itself contains the selective focus and interpretation of the facts typical of all propaganda. It argues that it will raise the public's critical awareness of art while trying to ensure that the institutional structures and planning systems of past failures remain intact and unchallenged.

Public sector funding for the arts came about because they were seen to be something more than entertainment and of value to society. Together with Health Care and Education they were identified as requiring Government support to ensure their place in a progressive society which recognised the need that they be free for everyone as part of the Welfare State. Removed from this and put into free market



terms the arts are just another commodity. The Myerscough report on the economic importance of the arts, prepared for the Policy Studies Institute in 1988 stated that the arts provided employment for half a million people with an annual turnover of £10 Billion. As part of its overall



attempt to dismantle the Welfare State, the Government aim to claw back most of this and redirect the remainder into the hands of private companies. They have embarked on a process to initially mesh private and public sector funding, with projects such as the **Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme**. This is the transition period where essentially the State's responsibility and accountability to the Arts, Health Care, Education and Social Services will be non-existent.

Whether the arts are dictated to by the Government via the Arts Councils or by the enlightened patronage of the Local Councils, they will still have to justify their existence by gearing themselves to the needs of private companies. It all conspires into an ugly vision of the future: a controlled leisure society where shell-suited families swarm with fluorescent hip pouches at the ready - athletes on a marathon spending spree in a society where culture is commerce.

WILLIAM CLARK

MICROCHIP

MY

TEXT: ED BAXTER

**VIRTUAL REALITY
AS OLD
HAT**

ILLUSTRATIONS: GRAHAM HARWOOD

MR

ON

SHOULDER:

'Mr Bluebird on my shoulder,
It's real, it's actual,
Everything is matterrrorfactual.'
- Burl Ives in Disney's 'Song of the South'

An advertising slogan from my childhood stated that 'You can't get closer than a Corgi', referring to a make of toy car, though no doubt subliminally hinting also at our beloved Monarch's canine familiars. Authenticity was Corgi's boast. Their model of James Bond's Aston Martin would be worthy of a separate essay - Gilbert Adair is probably working on it right now - but suffice to observe at present that it featured a bullet-proof shield, ejector seat, retractable machine guns and Ben Hur style razor-sharp hub-caps. All that high technology fuelled an emotional infantilism, excusable enough in a six year old. The fact that adults too could be found drooling over the life-size fantasy toy escaped me at the time, but that this was probably the case is indicated by the current emotional investment - chiefly, though not exclusively, by middle-aged men - in the concept of Virtual Reality.

An Operation Margarine of computer-generated versions of reality is already underway. The computer, that '*machine of machines*' (Turing), has become the '*word of words*': to invoke it is to lay claim to the unliberated present and a future of infinite possibility. That the realms of the unreal are described in a rhetoric peppered with superlatives does not disguise the essentially atrophied nature of the visions of many of those with their finger on the button. A parallel can be found in the closed world of UFO contactees, who spread the good word about the Aliens, usually along the following lines:

technologically they are twenty thousand years in advance of us, they can live for ever, they can travel across the galaxy in a couple of minutes. Then the bad news: they are just like us in every other respect, have parliamentary democracy, look a lot like Michael Jackson, race fast cars, &c. So . . . When I hear people talking about '*the new creativity*', I reach for my 'TV Quick' to see how the old one is doing.

Day for Night

Put crudely, VR comprises a three-dimensional interface between human and computer. Access to a pre-programmed synthetic environment is afforded by means of goggles (a computer screen brought close to the retina), supplemented perhaps by gloves or entire body suits. Perception of the artificial space is primarily visual: as Nam June Paik said about video, it allows one to 'fly' - here through an apparently 3-D imaginary 'reality'. The interface also allows for the translation of physical actions into and out of the VR space: say you cross your fingers while wearing the wired-in glove, the artificial hand perceived on the screen crosses its fingers; and at the same time, a mechanical hand linked to the computer may cross its fingers. This means, to cite a practical example of the application of VR, that you can bang a virtual nail into a virtual plank of wood in virtual space while, via electronically transmitted information, a mechanical hand bangs a real nail into a real plank on board a real space satellite.


The possibilities for mass-production are obvious: for instance, a single skilled worker can assemble a complicated device while wired up to innumerable robots which will simulate his actions - but which don't have to learn his skills.

Such social implications of VR, however, have barely been raised in public. Rather, it is thought of and generally discussed in terms of entertainment, pleasure and endlessly seductive fun. As the immortal Cilla once sang, 'Step inside, love - let me show you the way . . .'

Commercial VR of the kind to which ordinary mortals are allowed access is still in its infancy: currently on offer is a game in which one adopts the identity of a fighter pilot. Ironically, as they say, real fighter pilots - those employed in the Gulf War, for example - also participate in this kind of game: their missions are conducted

not by peering out the window and barking 'Okay, Ginger, bombs away', but by engaging with images read off a screen. Data is gathered by satellite and hi-tech photo-reconnaissance, to be played back later - the missiles guided to their targets in an electronic micro-world. This control of reality also functions as an anaesthetic: the dislocation is both physical and psychological, not merely a bypassing of an awkward three-dimensional world, but a kind of 'out of body' experience. Things no longer happen 'down there', on the ground or in real time and space, but 'up here', in the flotation tank of the mind. It would be interesting to analyse the parallels between the tendencies characteristic of New Age consciousness, so-called, and the disembodied mentality nourished by advanced electronic technology. The two meet most precisely in certain cybergnostic lifestyles, which embrace a masochistic attitude towards the human body, more or less a gut-conviction in the superiority of machines, a fascination with arcane lore, &c.; but a diluted, more generalised kind of Panic Mysticism is also currently in the ascendant, combining an AIDS-led retreat from physicality, elements of down-home survivalism and a peculiarly self-effacing narcissism. As Margaret Thatcher, for so long a barometer of the lumpenproletariat translation of such tendencies, once put it, 'There is no such thing as society.' In place of the social, safe havens in the form of cults, pseudo-religions





**AT LAST,
I DON'T HAVE TO STARVE,
BEAT OR HUMILATE MYSELF
INTO SUBJUGATION
THIS MACHINE WILL DO IT AT
TEN TIMES THE SPEED AND
HALF THE COST...**

and specialist enclaves. In place of communication, ritual incantations, cliché, in-jokes or jargon. To regret this state of affairs is to open oneself to accusations of sentimentality. Shut your eyes and think of England.

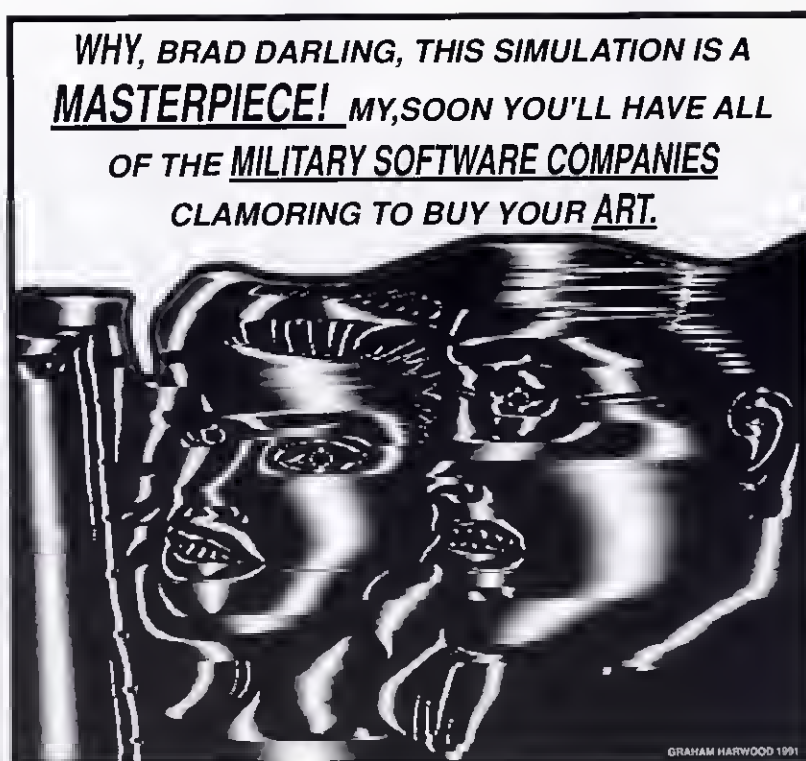
With our phasers set on smile

The fighter-pilot and the thrill-seeker, then, are by no means exceptional cases, but are exemplary – their activities are perhaps more intimately bound up with high-technology but are nevertheless mere variations on a theme; and while the New Ager brings back to the quotidian world visions of harmony and gnosis, and the UFO contactee brings stern warnings from our evolutionary superiors, the fighter pilot returns to base with a vision of the world as an electronically controllable system. Each offers a resolution to social problems, not just a way of grasping the world, but a blueprint for its obsolescence. It is perhaps redundant to observe that, structurally, the real has taken a back seat in this scenario. Anyone who has turned on a television in the last ten years, watched the pop stars faces huge and off-colour on the gigantic screens at Wembley charity bashes, watched the smart bombs shuffle down the Baghdad smokestacks, watched 'Brookside' or the adverts it interrupts, will have noticed this already. It is a commonplace that, just as God disappeared in the early Victorian age, so in our times the real has beaten a retreat. We still believe in it, kind of, but it doesn't manifest itself in the old familiar ways; it comes in quote-marks, to be met by cool indifference. It's inadequate, bothersome, and where's the punch-line? Reality, the argument goes, needs taming, but it needs brightening up too. VR is a redemptive project, and it is no surprise to find that both scientists and artists involved in its realisation should be caught extending sweaty hands, each promising the other a fusion of disciplines – and all the while holding out hopes of a new creative era, in the white heat of which true freedom will at last be forged. In short, as any reader of *'Mondo 2000'* will be aware, a kind of rogue escapism, heralded by ecstatic claims to the effect that the new technology radically alters consciousness. But so did the old technology, surely? – and any progress that may have been made

recently is essentially quantitative. (There's a generalised confusion as to what is meant by the word 'technology', so that outlandish visions, be they nightmares or daydreams, are conjured up by people speaking about 'being intimate with technology'. The rampant fantasists would do well to observe that combing your hair, as Jane explained to Tarzan, is being intimate with technology).

Given the aforementioned state of affairs, however inadequately sketched out, what of the aesthetic dimension of VR and its attendant disciplines? Evidently, technology, of whatever kind, does not have precisely predictable consequences; rather, it is characterised in rigid terms by those enlightened groups who set, or wish to set, the cultural agenda. By default or by active participation, much artistic response to recent technological innovation has been such as to sustain the cosy and mind-numbing myths of a volatised designer culture in which there are no longer any excuses for being miserable. It's hard to argue with people who are genuinely bappy listening to synthesised music stripped of all human content. ('Perhaps you're not intelligent enough to appreciate it,' is the schoolboy retort when one complains). It's hard too to avoid adopting the tendency to universalise and dismiss as useless anything implicated in the contemporary notion of chip-driven progress. On the one hand, we cannot side with the reactionaries, who weep with nostalgia at the ubiquity of personal computers and compact discs and hold in their hearts Luddite longings for the Golden Age of Slate. On the other hand, we cannot take seriously those opportunists who hope to transform their tired old work and flagging careers by doing crash courses in digital technology. (To be written on the bathroom mirror: There is only one Pee Wee Herman).

In *'Duck Soup'*, a porcelain jug gets stuck on Groucho's head and, instead of trying to remove it, Harpo simply paints glasses and moustache on it – a scene curiously expressive of the contemporary dilemma facing artists and the possible roles now on offer. The question which remains is, are these options preferable to the more established habitual practices of hitting your head against the wall, or having someone else hit your head against the wall?



 **Strathclyde
Transport**

Bellgrove

BI



The **Ballgrova Station Billboard Project** was initiated by **Alan Dunn** Glasgow in 1990. It stands up as an imaginative model of an artists initiative in the area of temporary public art. At the outset, the project set itself an open brief: artists proposals should take into consideration the context of the station, work with minimal resources to produce original artworks for a purposefully built billboard measuring 20 feet by 5. The project ran from September 1990 to August 1991 and involved 17 artists. All the work ran for one month, except for June, which involved three weekly placements. Because of the financial restraints (each project

working with a budget of £20), all the works were handpainted rather than industrially produced in multiples. In this sense, they differ from many other billboard project which mimic the dominant imagery and language of advertising.

In September 91, the panel was dismantled and removed thus returning the site to its original condition. In the following interview, participating artist, **Craig Richardson**, spoke to the project initiator **Alan Dunn** about the issues involved. The interview took place in May 1991, 9 months into the project.

LLBOARD

Project

CR Can you describe the physical location of the billboard, or the plaque as I prefer to call it, and the use of the station?

AD Bellgrove may be considered a geographical threshold, the boundary between a so-called city centre and a peripheral area of Glasgow in the Eastern area, the junction between the industrial and residential areas. Bellgrove was once a focus of industry and commerce, but now apart from commuter usage, the station has three main functions, access to: Celtic football ground, the unemployment office and a second hand car lot. The people who pass along this line are usually travelling home and the billboard is suited to reading from the platform and from the trains. The station is at low-level and very well concealed from the street. Once through the narrow entrance you step down into the sunken platform and the 'real world', the noise, the street gradually recedes. It's very quiet on the platform itself.

CR That the station is unmanned is a crucial factor in the experience of the place. There definitely is an atmosphere of threat and isolation.

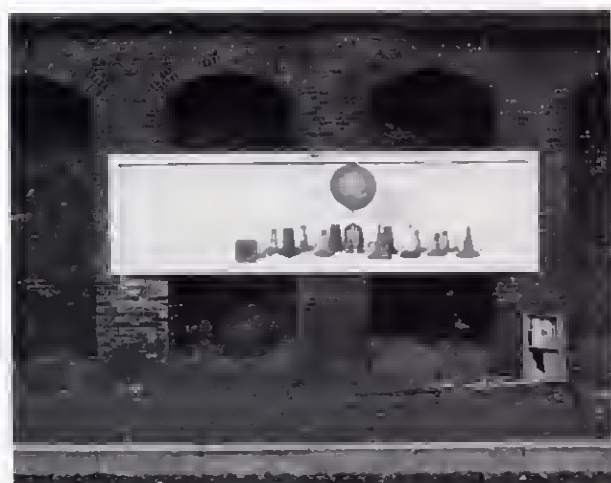
AD It has been a kind of no-go area for non-passengers for many years now. Apart from the physical evidence of crime - recently one part of the station was burnt down - there is something perceptible in the air, which seems to be reflected in the way people stare at the retaining wall which is dark and overpowering as opposed to looking south to the new green area and private housing. There's some connection between that wall, the panel, the live wires: there is a threatening undertone.

CR None of the works are visibly optimistic, they dwell on the social structure of the site and have picked up on the repressive politics of the situation, apparent in the decaying architecture, the constant interruption of services and of course the fatal train accident of two years ago in which two people were killed. In this context it would be patronising to offer 'solutions', indeed the collaborative work by **James Kelman** and **Alex Dempster** deliberately reflected the urban squalor of the place and in this way could be seen as 'protest'. Is it possible the artists are fortuitously adding to the repressive atmosphere?

AD There is a danger of the artists exploiting the drama of the place, responding to the threat, secure that they do not need to use this line everyday. The work by Kelman/Dempster, for example, seemed to be more about a *type* of situation, and it thrived upon being placed in surroundings where a perception of threat or repression is conceivable, although Kelman's 'urban panic' references did encourage very specific and local relationships to be made.

CR Most billboard projects attempt a Trojan-horse entrance into the world through pre-existing structures. Are you critical of these projects that are not dependant upon the physical reality of their sites, where for instance a **Willie Doherty** is shown in similar urban sites across the country and replicates the conventional billboard advertising process with accidental juxtapositions of art, advertising and events occurring in a hit-and-miss fashion?

AD I've done it myself over the years. Billboard projects do need



a new set of values not based upon how many cities they tour to. This project is site-specific. A relationship is built from one work to the next although work placed alongside commercial billboards can throw up some interesting juxtapositions, like a Les Levine work beside a 'Rambo' film poster.

CR None of the works so far have come from the 'community'. Artists have superimposed their imagery upon the site while they might be said to be exploiting it. What about the moral dimension to public art?

AD First of all, the community here is not residential. It is a community determined in terms of commuting rather than in any close-knit geographical grouping. Secondly, there's no consultation on my part with the local community because I'm part of that community in terms of commuting. As long as I'm involved in the production of every work through site visits or collaboration and discussion of ideas, I'm a 'clearance' for anybody involved in the project. As a member of that community that has initiated the project and invited certain artists, I'm not an outsider. Admittedly, others from different backgrounds in terms of profession, birthplace, age and so on, have been selected to respond to the specific situation.

CR It is difficult to find a common consensus anyway, although problems can arise for artists when there is no direct consultation. In the hearings to withdraw Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* from its New York site his lawyer argued that if you let one community decide what happens on their doorstep then you must let all decide and that could lead to anarchy: paradoxically public art defended as private property and affirming the values of private property. Whether dealing with or avoiding it, all public art highlights the use, control and ownership of the land/locale it resides in. The one thing that is effective about a billboard in that area, aside from the specific, is that it means someone is thinking about the place who isn't a commuter or overseer. **Anne Quinn** and **Peter Gilmour's** collaborative work, for instance, gave a textual identity to the site, although in a different way from the platform signs.

AD In response to signs dealing exclusively with text, like street names, they tried to make an equivalent in image, with no text. They selected an anonymous image of a family unit, a universal type.

CR It's like a piece of letraset, a symbol, a directional sign . . .

AD A symbol very quickly understood, like an airport type signifier, but also a symbol to indicate ownership. I have had discussions with them about the psychology of the platform as to where certain groups of people stand on it. Family groups, people with kids or prams do not tend to go too far up the platform and don't stray too far from the bottom of the entrance stairs.

CR The image looks like a happy family of consumers on their way to shop.

AD The piece is quite tongue-in-cheek with the notion that if you don't have anything else then you always have your family. The area beyond the platform, Dennistoun and Parkhead, has always been quite strong on the 'following generations' and many generations stay in one single area. Although newcomers have started to move in, it has always been a family oriented area and they are making a comment on that by picking a stereotype of that community and by using a colour that has multiple references, a deep blue that has always been used by Scotrail to signify their property. It resonates with 'this is a commercial production'. Each work has to survive for thirty- one days, to get enough multiple references to retain interest, which makes Thomas Lawson's piece quite interesting in that it played on an event that was going to take place - a football match - to revive its intent.

CR His work is a highly structured image of police in silent consultation, assured of their authority overseen and sanctioned by the State, in this case symbolised by a lion from the George Square Cenotaph. This contained grouping is usually present in places where crowds congregate and it suggests that the security the police offer both protects and intimidates simultaneously. It could be seen as a metaphor for the entire situation.

AD The only time the station is officially manned by Scotrail is in conjunction with Strathclyde Police on the occasion of Celtic football games, which have their own history of crime and fiction in the area.

CR Through the working structure of the project, you have avoided the necessity for artists to gain permission to make works which criticise those who 'permit' the project to take place. Do you think you have side-stepped an important aspect in the placement of work, the process of persuasion? Had Scotrail known Tom Lawson would be disparaging of the police do you think they would have been willing to let it appear?



Alan Dunn



Ross Sinclair

AD There weren't any restrictions in the project's brief. Interference is preferable to blunt condemnation otherwise it would probably result in the termination of the project, although the work by **Ross Sinclair** for May was considered by the billboard company as 'too political'; having the Union Jack, the national flag, next to the word 'HATE' seemed a bit too blunt for them, which resulted in their paste-up employees putting up the word 'HAT'. So, the work was compromised by interferences from the authorities in the placing of the work according to the artists specifications. Long term discussion is all the project can offer, although there should always be a place for strategic politically-orientated work within a twelve month project, like the approaches of someone such as **Hans Haacke**.

CR All the works so far have utilised contemporary imagery and ideas in recent memory. There's been an avoidance of dwelling upon history as a grand given concept. Is this the result of the urgency of the issues of the site?

AD The site has such a strong identity already with the past, there's no need to create it, but there is a need to focus it, to draw attention to the aura of the past. This particular project represents one approach, and it broadly deals with the urgent need to deal with the here and now . . . I prefer works which are time-specific. In your own piece was the phrase 'Slowly all around you will pass away' which had a finality about it and offered a conclusion to the site whilst other works questioned or challenged. I suppose you took a risk formally by presenting it in Scotrail typeface and colours.

CR The work's temporal nature is part of its meaning, it happened in the middle of the project which was also the coldest point of the year and, by extension, a very depressing time in World events as a result of the Gulf War. My own piece existed within these contexts. But another context to the whole project is public art's role in the changing city. Permanent public art, like **Ian Hamilton Finlay's** 'All Greatness Stands Firm in the Storm' in the Broomielaw, may end up as decoration in a disenfranchised environment. It's title has many references. But ownership and permanence go together, people don't invest in the transitory.

AD It is one of the exciting challenges of public art - to make a work for it's time, and perhaps the Bellgrove Project is different in that sense from other projects. That is another issue which is open to constructive debate.

CR I like the temporal nature of the works, a temporality which breaks two golden rules of art; timeless quality and universality. In the art world, universality has been greatly discredited, mainly it might be suggested by feminist theory, but timeless quality as an issue appears to live on. I find it interesting that people like Jenny Holzer are now achieving Old Master status. Maybe what finally happens is that people equate the truly temporal with the disposable.

AD It depends which models Bellgrove is discussed in relation to. The approach of the project in relation to Public Art is not consolidated and is at an early stage but that is one of its aims - to accept working in the urban environment while your ideas are still developing, and to accept the ephemeral and the temporal but relate that positively to architecture that changes. Proposing other functions for this wall, this platform, this warehouse, this is positive renovation. 'Building a satisfying shape or form then fitting a function into it', that tends to be the first thing people respond to emotionally, the shape, the colour and so on.

CR Does the project end?

AD There has been a temptation to extend this work as a permanent supplementary art-space but that goes against original principles. It interferes with the architecture, it's not a billboard on a hoarding. It appeared anonymously as does each work and it's visibly uncredited. It has to be viewed as a model that can be repeated somewhere else, an experiment.



PROFESSIONAL FOULS

TEXT: DOUG AUBREY

Post Modernism, 'Panic Culture', the reported 'death' of everything from the Avante Garde to rock n' roll. Such is the thrill of leaving the 20th Century. By way of a contrast, it also brings a 'renaissance' and rekindled interest in (of all things) Football. Suddenly, intellectual premier leaguers, popular culture's 'new wave' of First Division 'Mediaristocrats' and artist's in any division can admit that they love the people's game.

Football: a culture generally anathema to the guardians of high art, elitist academics and many that spout radical views (yet often retain inherently class based values) has now become the subject of everything from arts magazine features, to relevant source material for the much name dropped Jean Baudrillard. The 'cult of the popular' as it now exists in Great Britain Ltd's Media Apparatus and specifically in a popular culture highlight such as football, is no longer a spectator sport, watched by a predominantly male (heterosexual) audience, but a media spectacle (and still dominated by heterosexual males). A spectacle which, in true Baudrillardian fashion, we now find ourselves participating in: either consciously or unconsciously.

HEYSEL/HILLSBOROUGH/BRADFORD: AN ATROCITY EXHIBITION

"Stadiums are built as monuments to a city or country and serve the aims of representation. They are rituals that confirm a city. Their other functions - such as use for political rallies - reinforces this. At the same time, they seek to contain the crowd. In extreme cases they can become prisons. That was the case during the overthrow of Allende in Chile and continues to be the case in soccer stadiums in Britain, where - because of the fear of autonomous noise and loss of social control - stadiums become prisons for hooligan gangs. The walls of a stadium insure that a fee will be paid for entrance but also create the illusion of the city or state as separate and bounded . . . It's boundaries are accepted by fans because, unlike the rest of daily life, they allow for ritualistic and sacred space where the populace can create itself as a group. Only as a mob invading the city do fans emerge united. The crowd accepts its role as representative of the populace in a perverse way and collectively makes its appearance as outsiders to the city . . ."

Rod Dubey (From 'Indecent Acts in Public Places')

Switching on late, to any one of three matches on British Television during the eighties and you would find yourself confronted not with a game of football, but:

- A Soccer War between Liverpool and Juventus fans in a neglected and decaying stadium, result: 42 fatalities.
- A wooden, pre 2nd World War stand burning, the occupants, lucky enough to escape, running and emerging, in some instances like human



MEDIA CASUALTIES

torches from the inferno out onto the pitch, result: 56 dead.

- Liverpool supporters drowning in the open air in a crush of bodies at Sheffield's Hillsborough ground, one Saturday afternoon and spilling out into the goal mouth, result : 95 dead.

Perverse, or convenient?. In every instance, the television cameras were there to bear witness to these events live and in the end provided not only a 'scoop' but also vital, undisputed evidence for the largely ignored Taylor Report (commissioned after the Bradford Fire and Hillsborough disaster), which attempted to address the real problems that those of us that have ever been inside a football ground encounter. It seems easy for semi-detached 'experts' who represent the best (vested?) interests of the game to call for 'national service' and 'capital punishment' for the hooligans (supposedly) responsible for the events listed. Or, indeed, for politicians to call for increased state surveillance and further infringement upon our bodies and liberties through ID card schemes and electronic tagging, yet still parsimoniously defend the neglect by many Football clubs of their number one assets - The Fans.

Unfortunately, football (like most pop music), now seems to be first and foremost about the controlled and sponsored spectacle. More about a 'product delivered to a consumer by a sponsor', in most cases more interested in their own commercial and economic status and returns, than the elements that make up the real game and for whom it still has a genuine cultural meaning. Football, alcohol and violence are all

part of that culture - a fact that the Taylor Report however, did not really get a grasp of:

"I know of no other sport or establishment in a civilised country in which it is necessary to keep those attending from attacking each other" (the Taylor Report) but apart from suggesting that further specific offences be created and that electronic tagging be introduced, he fails to grasp what hooliganism is about or to put forward any new solutions, preferring instead to take the moral high ground. Few people in authority seem to realize that violence is a release of pent up frustration and hooliganism is also a good laugh to those involved . . ."

Richard Turner (from 'In Your Blood')

Those of us brought up in a culture of Puma Football boots, kick-about in parks and council housing estates, Subbuteo, collecting ESSO World cup coins and supporting forth division teams, in the affluent third of the country, find ourselves after the events of the eighties, shocked into a kind of post - atrocity 'soccer panic'. The reality is that a genuine working class experience, has turned into a Corporate controlled video nasty and moved into the realms of 'Hyper- Realism', where we have witnessed events, that wouldn't be out of place in a JG Ballard novel.

In an age when Satellite Technology not only delivers the viewer to an advertiser and politician alike, it is perhaps revealing that fans







Pub Team by Peter Thomas, 1990

can still suffer and be held responsible for such atrocities, while the Media Apparatus more generally refuses to acknowledge or accept that it too has an associated share of the moral and ethical responsibility for such events.

Amid the carnage of the three scenarios: Heysel, Hillsborough, Bradford, you couldn't help but feel that somewhere, someone was making money and perhaps realize who the real culprits are for bringing the much maligned people's game into so much disrepute.

THE LION RAMPANT & THE COSTA RICA COMPLEX

In 'Hampden Babylon' **Stuart Cosgrove** (Late Show Presenter and St Johnstone FC fan) dishes the dirt on Scottish Football, culling from back copies of popular Scottish newspapers scandal about Scotland's professional footballing casualties.

Or does it? The scandal he supplies doesn't really tell us anything that we didn't already guess (or read in the tabloids) and indeed confirms many popular preconceptions (myths?) about footballers, which is maybe an aim of the book. Inferring that they aren't always the brightest of boys, that the talent that lies in the 'magic' at their feet is quickly replaced by an obsession with what bangs between their legs. Like their loyal fans, it also appears that a key element to many footballer's career is alcohol and the ability to drink and 'rammie' with the best in the kebab shops and more 'exclusive' night clubs of a city like Glasgow. By attempting to sensationalize such exploits, Cosgrove perhaps misses the point that what makes football and hooliganism so appealing to disenfranchised youths, also appeals to their 'Saturday heroes'. In short: an Adrenalin drive and the fact that half the battle is always against yourself, as George Best proved on the Terry Wogan show.

The real highlight of Hampden Babylon, lies not so much in the Kenneth Anger inspired attempt to dish up dirt, especially when sex, drugs, lager, blood and rock n roll are all party to the Media icons lifestyle (in real terms, the ex player Justin Fashanu's 'coming out' was probably more revealing about football, sexuality and it's obsession with body/fluids, than anything in Babylon), but in it's more implicit statement on Scotland as a nation, still seemingly more interested in 'gubbing' the English than articulating its Scottish (and European) identity.

In a (Labour) controlled country, essentially ruled by a (Conservative) dinner party elite in Edinburgh, it's a pity that more attention wasn't being paid to the state of the national stadium and the chants, dissent, energy, inbred protest and bigotry of the terraces, rather than to scandal in the gutter press, or the lyrical and romantic whimsy of affluent soft soul pop bands and 'Scottish Exports' like Deacon Blue.

THE FALL OF THE CASUAL & THE RISE OF THE PITBULL

If the Eighties saw the death of 'cloth cap Socialism' and the birth

of its designer variant, along with the rise of the much maligned 'Yuppie', it also saw the end of the Skinhead/Bootboy and birth of the 'Casual' in football culture.

In Scotland, aside from the ongoing sectarian feuding of Celtic and Rangers, other supporters emerged in the course of the decade to challenge the 'Old Firm's' drunken domination on and off the terraces. These new hooligans, seldom wore club colours, but instead dressed in stylish sports wear and 'casuals' (often with the same 'labels' as their image conscious yuppie counterparts such as Armani, Fila, Taccini or Ellesse) and often left their 'firms' business cards on their battered victims.

During the Eighties, pride of place was taken by the Aberdeen Soccer Casuals (A.S.C.). As Scotland's most successful club in the first 6 years of the decade, Aberdeen FC and their Soccer Casuals boasted 'away wins' in all of Scotland's major cities, both on the pitch and in the streets of Glasgow, Perth, Motherwell, Dundee and Edinburgh alike. What typified this and similar groups, such as West Ham's 'Inter City Firm' (I.C.F.) was their 'relative' affluence (oil rich Aberdeen Companies and The London Dockland Development Corporation, being the sources of employment and high wages, for the Aberdeen and West Ham Casual respectively) which - like their equally competitive, style obsessed yuppie counterparts - gave them the means to be able to travel widely to games in Britain and Europe alike.

'Bloody Casuals' by Jay Allan is a personal account of the activity of the A.S.C during the eighties. It's style is very much in keeping with the 'Skinhead' and 'Suedehead' novels of the seventies, with Allan describing in detail his adventures in Britain and Europe, leading up to a short prison sentence in 1986, for his part in a conspiracy to 'ambush' Motherwell's 'Saturday Service Crew' in Aberdeen. Allan provides a unique, non sociologist/non media pundit's view of life on the terraces (and possibly a hard edged commentary on eighties working class youth), before inevitably answering the simple question: WHY?

AFC
"famous soccer hooligans"
CONGRATULATIONS:
YOU HAVE JUST MET THE-
A/DEEN SOCCER CASUALS-
(SCOTLANDS' HARDEST)

Casual calling card





Photo by Ross Sinclair

"Being a casual, is great fun but as most people are against us what can they do to stop it? Well there is no doubt that the lack of involvement of the fans with the clubs in Britain is a factor In Britain the fiction writers on the back page of the local papers is all you have to keep you going from one Saturday to the next . . . There is no doubt that organized hooliganism is partly the fans way of getting involved in the goings on, of getting noticed and sharing the headlines with the heroes. A big story in the press about your mob is a real boost to any casual . . . If you have made the papers you have had some kind of success."

Jay Allan 'Bloody Casuals'

The antecedents of the Casuals can be found in youth cults like the skinheads of the seventies, the Mods of the sixties and the first generation Teddy Boys (as portrayed by Richard Attenborough in the film version of Graham Greene's 'Brighton Rock') in the post war period. Other examples can be plotted back further, though all share the same fundamental facts: that clothing 'style', street fighting and what is more generally portrayed in the media as 'hooliganism' in this country are all very much a part of the working class experience, provoked also perhaps now by the fact that:

"It really shouldn't surprise anybody that so many of the youth today find fun in violence. All our lives we have had the glories of the World Wars and the Vietnam War and even intergalactic war bombed at us by some of the greatest talents in the world. Films, magazines, comics and of course TV glorify battle . . . Try to think how many films are aimed at youth where the hero has to kill someone or batter someone somewhere along the line . . . Violence is drummed in and drummed in and it becomes so strong my stomach tightens up with excitement just writing this. How many heroes are gentle, mellow and peace loving?"

Jay Allan 'Bloody Casuals'

The recent swift demise of the hooli/idealism apparent in Acid Culture (with it's casual and footballing allegiances), into one of burned out brains, drug vendettas and gun laws, along with the rise to notoriety of the Pitbull and Banddog are all possible symptoms of the shape of things to come. But also it is symptomatic of a culture, which condemns what it calls 'Casual' cults, neuters and even calls for the mass destruction of fighting dogs, yet continues to sanction the 'blood sports' of the aristocracy, for reasons of 'Tradition'. Equally, those in more 'privileged' positions (who wouldn't even be considered as hooligans) continue to be able to indulge and get the same 'casual' buzz and adrenalin thrill, that Jay Allan refers to as being 'better then sex', in everything from paragliding, to skiing and more recently in 'survival courses' and 'Paintball War games'.

PROTEST, FOLK & 'PUNK' FOOTBALL

"Not extrinsic to soccer, violence against authority has always been a basic part of the game. The peasant precursor to soccer was the folk football played in villages throughout Europe. Without codified rules, it was a game with many

variations. Characteristically though, it was a raucous festival whenever it was played, going on for a day and ending in drunken revelry Since anyone could join in, there was no distinction between fans and players . . . Thus, the authority of the officials and the rules of football (devised at private schools) that made the game legally acceptable (tellingly known as laws) can be seen as an extension of the laws and authority of the state. An attack on one, therefore, is an actual, rather then symbolic, attack on the other . . ."

Rod Dubey (Indecent Acts in Public Places)

In Glasgow's East End a Sunday afternoon spectacle is the mass game. Played on concrete or shale pitches, it usually involves 30-40 males, dressed in a multitude of different colours (reflecting the usual Celtic/Rangers allegiances but also the 'styles' of Barcelona and Inter Milan among others) and wearing expensive cross train sports shoes, playing a game which resembles, to the passing anthropologist, something similar to the game as it existed in the 19th century: Folk football.

Elsewhere in the city and in housing estates, concrete and tin ghettos world-wide, gangs of both male and female players can be seen kicking a ball around, acting out their fantasies and pretending to be their local stars, adapting the 'laws' of the 20th Century game to suit their particular circumstance and environment and playing often in matches without duration. Examples of changes to the laws of the controlled game, include the 'rush goalie': When two teams are unevenly matched, the goalkeeper effectively becomes an out field player or 'sweeper keeper', resulting in high scoring games, with players soon losing count of the goals scored (which become less and less important as games continue). While the use of concrete walls allows for rebounds instead of throw-ins and redefines a pitch in relation to available space. To it's credit, a city like Glasgow has realized the importance of the street/folk game and is probably one of the few places where you're never very far away from a 'scratch' pitch of sorts (or motorway, for that matter).

'Indecent Acts in Public Places' by Rod Dubey, explores the roots of insolence and sedition in football, looking at how the game and it's associated culture emerged, making the point that in considering football hooliganism as separate from the game as it is played in stadiums is missing the point. In the containment and control of the game (and it's appropriation by media/corporate wealth) he sees that:

"Those critics who argue to reduce soccer violence (are) people who have missed the point of soccer's development as a spectator sport. They do not see that two distinct games have sprung from folk football: the sanctioned game on the field and the unsanctioned game in the stands. As representatives of law and order they seek to protect the former and destroy the latter. By doing so, they become a contributing factor to more violence, since it is a violence essentially directed at the state . . ."

He suggests, that the game itself, along with other sports (such as baseball) at first banned by the Church and state because of their



threat to 'order', were then organized, controlled (with their own laws) and contained on pitches and eventually in stadiums, before finally as is the case in the current era, appropriated as 'spectacle' within the Global media network. This, at the same time as further disenfranchising those playing the unsanctioned game on the terraces: 'Not surprisingly, a working class youth often sees soccer hooliganism as an initial means of effecting change . . .' (Rod Dubey)

Just as 'fucking mental' and potentially subversive, is the support that a team like Hamburg's St Pauli can attract, where Anarchists, Squatters and a large female following 'every bit as fanatical as the male supporters' (Richard Turner) follow a team, whose players are reported to join in protests over issues ranging from the need for better housing, to anti-fascist demonstrations. In Glasgow meanwhile, several Celtic players have – reportedly in the past – dared to speak out against the poll tax and deprivation in the city's East End where the club have traditionally been based.

Perhaps however the real heartbeat of 'folk/punk' football, lies in the support attracted by hard working, but often not very good Scottish 2nd and English 3rd/4th division or junior league teams. Mostly located in the smaller and neglected towns and suburbs of Britain, the game on the field is often secondary to the one on the terraces (if there are any). In his short, sharp book, 'In Your Blood', Richard Turner has produced a genuine fan's view of the game generally, but as witnessed from the terraces of Stockport County (nr Manchester). It shows a passion and a genuine concern for the game as part of a 'folk/punk' culture and touches on both its positive and negative aspects, based on the premise that football (just like art or hairdressing) 'is a way of life for many people, one that is well worth defending against incompetent management, spiteful government legislation, greedy developers and media hysteria . . .'

It stands on the virtually empty terraces of polemical football writing as both an individualistic voice against the detached observations of 'Greavsie', Jimmy Hill and other 'experts', and like the BBC's Video Diary from Italia 90', reveals much about who *really* understands and cares about the state of the game. Itself a belated highlight from Italia 90', the Video diary 'On the March With Bobby's Army' features an England fan's (Kevin Allen's) own record and comment on his trip to the World Cup and captures it on a high street video format, something closer to what a real fan experiences. In the course of exposing how little that politicians, officials and the 'professional' media circus alike really care for football fans, the programme also proved that, in terms of media representation, anyone *could* potentially make engaging and relevant television – if they could get access to it.

'In Your Blood' and 'On the Match with Bobby's Army' both tackle and confront the discrimination of the terraces head on, highlighting the symptoms (such as sexism and racism) and possible antidotes to

soccer's ills (aside from those created by eating crap pies and drinking cold Bovril), while bringing to light football's more genuine voices of dissent. Such voices are equally as vocal in a stream of fanzines across Europe, where 'the message from virtually all these magazines, so varied in quality and allegiance, is clear. It is that football belongs not to television, to an elitist clutch of clubs, to rapacious agents or sensation hungry tabloids, or to the shareholders and sponsors, but to the people who's pounds and partisanship sustain the sport . . .' (Richard Turner)

Prominent among such fanzines at the moment are 'When Saturday Comes' which recently celebrated its 50th issue and Scotland's very own 'The Absolute Game', both of which offer an alternative perspective on the game and footballing culture generally. More specifically, the current club fanzine of the year 'Brian Moore's Head Looks Uncannily Like London Planetarium' is named after a famous English football commentator and supports fourth division English league side Gillingham.

All these fanzines are an attempt to do for football what independent record labels and their xeroxed equivalents did for music (and in the case of the Video Diary for Television). In short reclaim the game, the culture and the 'art' of football for those disenfranchised by a privileged minority of sponsors and media experts (both young and old), who sit in air-conditioned, glass-insulated, drinks cabinet equipped executive boxes and TV studios: people detached from, yet controlling events both on the pitch and TV screen alike. Maybe it's time they realized: that Football really is a game of two halves . . .

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The Folk Football of Glasgow

The Football Supporters Association





**SUBVERSION
SUBVERTED?**

the

SITUATIONIST LEGACY

TEXT: ALASTAIR BONNETT

In a conservative era extremism can have a strangely unnerving allure. As the banality of our increasingly nostalgic, self-satisfied culture becomes ever more wearing, so the aesthetics of transgression, of endless subversion, can, conversely, become more enjoyably surprising and irresistible.

What is unsettling about this process is the way it creates a chasm between our day-to-day struggles and intellectual fashion. The latter, cut free from mundane matters such as housing and employment, comes to see the aesthetics of radicalism as an end in themselves, thus stripping the political meaning from subversion.

This loss of the political is apparent in a wide range of recent and self-consciously 'extreme' cultural practices and theories, from Baudrillard to punk rock. However, one of the most startling contemporary examples involves the appropriation of the intellectual legacy of the **Situationists**.

Situationism has been rediscovered in the UK and America since the mid-1970's but, following a series of exhibitions and extensive coverage in the arts media, now seems finally set to enter the canon of great twentieth century 'isms'. However, in repackaging situationism for postmodern sensibilities, its political aspirations have largely been lost. After outlining the situationist project I'll give some examples of this process. I'll also be showing why situationism was so ripe for subversion and explain why, potentially, the group's most contemporary legacy lies in the struggle to reshape our everyday environment.

The situationist challenge

Active in the late 1950's and throughout the 1960's, the Paris based Situationist International (SI) developed a form of cultural politics designed to challenge a new phase in the capitalist domination of human relations.

In itself the situationists' obsession with the alienating and passifying power of capitalism was hardly new. But their concern to rethink the way this process worked and could be undermined in the context of an increasingly consumer orientated, advertising and media saturated society led them to some original theses. **Guy Debord**, the intellectual leader of the movement, describing the onset of what he termed 'the society of the spectacle' (1), argued that the basis of society has shifted from the production and consumption of things to the production and consumption of images. The situationists argued that, because such alienating images are now all pervasive, merely to oppose them through a series of nonconformist stereotypes is to become part of the spectacle. Thus they dismissed the radical potential of nearly all the oppositional currents of their day, including neo-Dadaism, beat culture and the hippy movement. Such 'alternatives' were seen as playing the spectacle's own game.

Although the situationists developed several strategies to oppose spectacular relations, the most widely practised has been **detournement**. Detournement involves taking elements from a social stereotype and, through their mutation and reversal, turning them against it so it becomes disrupted and exposed as a product of alienation. It was





Debord, Dahou and Wolman (circa 1954).

argued that this parodic destabilization of the commodity-image could shock people out of their isolation and passivity. In the words of another situationist guru, **Raoul Vaneigem**, detournement 'entails a kind of anti-conditioning . . . to reverse perspective is to stop seeing things through the eyes of the community, of ideology, of the family, of other people' (2)

Although they employed the technique in films, the most famous use of detournement by the situationists was their re-scripting of cartoon strips with revolutionary messages. Detournement, however, only made sense of the SI as a tool of political mobilization and the movement's most influential members became critical of it when, through the 'detourned' paintings of artists such as **Asger Jorn**, it became associated with artistic experimentation. Indeed, so fearful were the situationists of such associations that all practicing artists were expelled from the group in the early 1960's and the phrase 'situationist art' declared a contradiction in terms.

In fact, the SI's hostility to a plurality of opinion within its ranks is a measure of the extraordinary atmosphere of 'political correctness' that permeated its tiny body of true believers. When the SI dissolved itself in 1972 it was left with three members, practically everybody else had been expelled! With this stench of moral certitude firmly in my nostrils I want now to consider the contemporary uses and abuses of situationism and explain how it has been depoliticized.

Subversion subverted

Visitors to the situationist exhibition held at London's ICA (and in Paris and Boston) in 1989 were presented with a seemingly endless collection of 'revolutionary items'. Thus, for example, all 12 metallic coloured copies of the SI's 'legendary' journal, *Internationale Situationiste*, were laid out alongside wall displays reminding us of exactly who joined the group and for what deviationist offences they were ejected. Neatly catalogued and under glass, the intriguing covers of these tracts were offered for our contemplation like any other assembly of fashionably 'oppositional' art. Other products of the recent boom of interest in the SI have fetishized their activities in similar ways. For example, in Greil Marcus's book *'Lipstick Traces'* (3), an exhilarating survey of the 'secret history' of obscure avant garde activity, the situationists' Political ideas are again marginalised by an obsession with their image of desperate extremism and glamorous wildness.

Between suitably out of focus photographs of gaunt young situationists, Marcus details the ephemera of the group's early existence - the poorly printed handouts, the calling cards - and calls our attention to the SI's 'hidden' influence upon counter cultural movements. One of the best known of these 'secret' connections, and the one that Marcus is particularly interested in, is the situationists' role as precursors to punk. Thus, for example, punk's ability to turn the commodities of rock music and youth culture inside out through the grotesque caricature of these forms, is shown by Marcus to parallel and, in part, directly draw from, the situationist methodology of detournement.



Gallizio and Jorn with Industrial Painting, 1960.



Guy Debord and Asger Jorn - *Memories*, from 'Internationale Situationist', Copenhagen 1959.

Yet although pop impressarios, from **Malcolm McLaren** to **Tony Wilson** have indeed used situationist ideas - with McLaren's graffiti covered torn clothes and the sand paper record sleeves of Wilson's **Factory Records** being some of the more direct lifts - this intellectual appropriation has shared with the ICA exhibition and Marcus's own book, a refusal to address situationism as first and foremost a revolutionary project. Looking back from the aloof heights of the 1990's it is evident that the 'anti-commodities', created by the promoters of punk and ultra-radicalism, are part of a carefully co-ordinated consumer package.

Set in this context the fact that a smoother version of the punk aesthetic of rough cut-up and bricolage became one of the most popular advertising styles of the 1980's, can hardly be called an illegitimate heir of the British pop situationists. Cut 'n' mix images in Barclay's bank adverts merely took the political decontextualisation of situationism to its logical conclusion, the subversion of the commodity sign in the service of the spectacle. Thus, McLaren, who has progressed from managing the Sex Pistols to directing adverts for Cadbury's Twirl, may simply be said to have refined his undoubted ability to flog radicalism as fashion.

Situationism into art

The radical allure of the SI has also attracted the attention of more conventionally serious cultural workers. This has happened in two main ways, through artists' direct appropriation of situationism and by art critics reading situationist influences into the work of painters and performers.

Some of the most interesting work in the former category has emerged from the Polish-Canadian **Krzysztof Wodiczko**. Wodiczko's main tool is the slide projector. With this he creates 'a critical public art' (4) designed to upset the established meanings of urban space. For example, in 1985 Wodiczko projected a swastika on the facade of South Africa House in Trafalgar Square. In the same year he beamed the image of Soviet and American missiles united by a chain and lock onto the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch in Brooklyn. Quoting Vancigem, Wodiczko aligns these interventions with the situationists' invocation 'to defend ourselves from the poetry of the bards of conditioning - to jam their messages, to turn their songs inside out'. The task of the critical artist, Wodiczko notes, is 'to continue the unfinished business of the situationist urban project'.

However, as I noted earlier, the SI's hostility to the social specialization of creativity led them to declare art, all art, intrinsically anti-situationist. Wodiczko's interest in the group does not extend to this side of their analysis. Yet it is difficult to see how he can legitimately ignore it. Ultimately, for all the stunning simplicity of his methods, Wodiczko cannot convincingly claim to be building on situationist ideas and at the same time subsume them within the tradition of artistic, individual avant-gardism the SI put so much rhetorical effort into denigrating.

However, although Wodiczko's use of situationism is problematic his work still represents a critique of the mainstream, gallery based, art market. The same cannot be said of many art critics new found and no doubt, short-lived, fascination with the SI. For the past few years situationist references have been dropped left, right and centre on the pages of fashion conscious art magazines. Most writers have made do with a few scattered references to Debord but an influential minority, such as the New York critic **Edward Ball**, have gone one better. Noting the shared emphasis on the playful subversion of the image within both situationism and postmodernity, Ball, has argued that the SI should be seen as the 'tutors of current activity' (5) in postmodern art. Ball draws into his situationist classroom artists as diverse as **Cindy Sherman**, **Jenny Holzer** and **Peter Halley**. The creators of, respectively, elusive self-portraits, epigrammatic neon slogans and day-glo cell paintings, these artists are all, apparently, drawing on the situationist methodology of detournement as a way of making their mark in a postmodern world of total simulation. Thus the SI's revolutionary ambitions are quietly forgotten as their historical role is reinterpreted as an off-shore Research and



Development lab for the New York arts scene.

Unsurprisingly, Ball sees Baudrillard, the ultimate theorist of postmodern superficiality and one time intellectual king of the New York art crowd, as a conduit for the insights of the situationists. However, despite the philosophical links that exist between situationism and Baudrillard, they divide when it comes to political ambition. For whilst Baudrillard, and his 'attendant' artists, constantly make hair-raisingly radical declarations on the 'end of reality' in the age of simulacrum (Baudrillard's apathetic version of the spectacle), they don't even pretend to offer any resistance to this process. Of course the situationists were proper revolutionaries . . .

It's all so unfair!

So the pure flame of the Situationist International has been corrupted. The progenitors of 'the most radical gesture' (6) have been emasculated by a load of self-seeking artistic types. It's all so unfair! Well, kind of. It's true that situationism has been depoliticized and aestheticized. It's also true that in many ways the situationists richly deserved this fate. I say this for two reasons, the first of which hinges on the situationists' own view of themselves and the second on the inadequacy of their central concept of the spectacle.

The situationists' carefully nurtured their image as the ultimate radicals. The painful self-consciousness and ridiculous pomposity of their constant denouncements of everybody and everything, including their own members, which fill their journals, make pitiful reading. Indeed, in the 1960's, what 'Le Monde' called the SI's 'snarling extravagant rhetoric' (7), attracted far more derision than respect for its slap-dash Hegelianism and unsupportable claims to be *superceding* every other perspective. It is hardly surprising, given the strength of the SI's narcissism, that this current could be developed in the 1970's and 1980's into an apolitical aesthetic of extremism.

This tendency has been supported by a second feature of situationism, its equation of the spectacle with all-encompassing alienation. The trouble with this idea is that it doesn't leave room for purposeful struggle but only the directionless mutation of present realities, or what Vaneigem called 'active nihilism'. The logical conclusion of this theory is exactly the kind of tedious celebration of meaninglessness seen in the work of Baudrillard and many postmodern artists. Indeed, the fact that the situationists did organise politically and in the late 1960's came to give most of their energies to council communism, is more a testament to their ideological confusion than their commitment to put their own ideas into practice.

I could conclude then by stating that a) the situationists have been depoliticized/postmodernized and b) they had it coming. This would be true enough but would miss what is the most exciting part of the situationist legacy. A part, moreover, that is generally side lined

by the SI's modern day interpreters. I am talking about the situationist critique of everyday space.

Making space

Although it is rarely recognised, the situationists made a potentially politically explosive attack on the boundary between specialized, institutionalized creativity and the routine geography of our day-to-day lives.

Unfortunately, the constantly enjoyable games of 'psychogeography', which first emerged out of the work of their principal forerunners, the **Lettrists International**, never really complemented the SI's earnest, if confused, critiques of 'the spectacle' and were quietly dropped from the group's overt agenda. However today, when political protest, from the poll tax riots to squatters fighting eviction orders, so often seems to be about who controls city space, the situationists' urban explorations retain a directness and political resonance sadly missing from other parts of their project.

Psychogeography is about the instinctual exploration of the emotional contours of one's environment. It aims to discover and create subversive and anti-authoritarian places and journeys that can be used in the development of new, more liberating, kinds of locales. Situationist psychogeographers adopted the practice of the *derive* (literally translated, 'drift') as their basic tool. To derive is to go on an unhindered, unstructured wander through the restrictive landscapes of everyday space. To **Chetchevlov**, who developed these ideas in the late 1950's, the derive is like a political psychoanalysis of the city. Like the psychoanalyst listening to a flow of words, Chetchevlov argued, the person on derive goes with the flow of the city, "until the moment when he rejects or modifies". (8)

The practical activity that emerged from the SI's psychogeographical theories ranges from seemingly inconsequential rambles around European cities to relatively rigorous and well documented experiments. An interesting example of the more relaxed approach is the Venice based derive carried out in 1957 by the English situationist **Ralph Rumney**. In the photo-essay that emerged from this trip Rumney explains how he followed a line through 'the zones of main psychogeographical interest' in Venice such as the 'sinister' zone of the Arsenale and 'beautiful ambience' of the Ghetto Vecchio. (9)

Rumney goes on to mention, albeit very briefly how people's 'play patterns' are affected by these zones and how this information may assist in 'the creation of situationist cities'. However, **Khatib's** psychogeographical study of the 'zones d'ambiance' of Les Halles in Paris provides us with more substantial conclusions (10). The ambiances of this environment are drawn by Khatib into a plan for the transformation of the area which would establish a new and perpetually changing landscape consisting of different and individually stimulating



situations, designed for and by those who use them, for the purposes of play and provocation. Khatib is particularly keen to construct a giant labyrinth out of the existing buildings on the site.

In the late 1960's such subversive/constructive suggestions were increasingly directly articulated on the streets of Paris through street riots/carnivals and graffiti such as 'Under the pavement - the beach'. Indeed, the art critic **Robert Hewison**, after arguing that the SI played an influential role in the failed revolution of May 1968, has recently suggested that it was a period in which 'cars, trees, and cafe tables were 'detoured' into barricades...a month long derive that rediscovered the revolutionary psychogeography of the city' (11).

Such rediscoveries have also emerged through contemporary struggles and point the way to the reconnection of the everyday with a reanimated politico-cultural radicalism. In the poll tax riots, for example, we saw how the exclusionary, passifying spaces of London's West End could become sites of communal challenge and adventure. Anyone at Trafalgar Square on the 31st March 1991 won't be able to see that landscape in the same way again, precisely because the riots opened up the rich possibilities of mutation and exploration inherent in that seemingly stable 'heart of empire'. A few years earlier the **Stop the City** campaign opened up a similar fragility in the day-to-day management of corporate London. Yet it ill serves either event to get too dewy eyed. Both the poll tax riots and Stop the City practised their own forms of exclusion. Dominated by the wearisome sight of 'angry young men' the diverse aspirations of other groups were left largely unrepresented. Thankfully, the possibilities of less ponderously macho geographies of transgression has been shown through the squatters movement and Greenham Common peace camp. Squatters' appropriation of the unused houses and offices controlled by the city's power brokers involves exactly the kind of politically engaged intrusion into the urban environment that the situationists were fumbling for. The Greenham Common peace camp opened up a similarly disruptive yet politically concrete new geography in and around the US army's missile bases. Although, since Cruise left, the peace camp has contracted, the questions it continues to raise about public access, direct action and women's organizational autonomy are now an unavoidable part of the explorations yet to come.

Of course, despite interesting parallels, these critical interventions owe nothing to the situationists. Yet if there is anything worth learning from the SI it is their ability to explore the potential for libertarian change embedded in our towns and cities. Perhaps then the practice of the derive and other situationist techniques could help turn the urgent, yet often incoherent, engagements with the spatial status-quo seen in recent struggles into something even more exciting and challenging. After all, we shouldn't just aspire to create temporary geographies of disruption but also serious and workable ideas/models

for the transformation of urban (and rural) living. It is towards precisely this task that the situationists' psychogeographical investigations were directed and may be used today by those seeking to develop the challenge to everyday space.

Thus while situationist ideas about 'the spectacle' and detournement seem increasingly naive, there remain legitimate parallels between psychogeography and contemporary, genuinely subversive, political movements. What is alluring about such explorations has little to do with the aesthetics of extremism and a lot to do with the very real possibilities of social transformation they open up before us.

Thanks to Alison Kaye for her useful comments on this article.

Notes

1. **G. Debord** (1977) *The Society of the Spectacle* (Black and Red, Detroit)
2. **R. Vaneigem** (1983) *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (Rebel Press and Left Bank Books, London) page 144
3. **G. Marcus** (1989) *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Secker and Warburg, London)
4. All quotes by **Wodiczko** are from his essay 'Strategies of public address: which media, which publics?' in *Dia Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Culture: Number One* Ed. H. Foster (Bay Press, Seattle) 1987.
5. **E. Ball** (1989) *The beautiful language of my century: from the Situationists to the Simulationists*, Arts Magazine (63: page 71.
6. *The Most Radical Gesture* is the title of a book by **Sadie Plant** on the situationists to be published in early 1992 (Routledge, London)
7. **Le Monde** quoted by **K. Knabb** (1981) *Situationist International Anthology* (Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley): page 382. Connoisseurs of extravagant rhetoric should also read Debord's truly bizarre update of his *Society of the Spectacle*, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (Verso, London), 1990
8. quoted by **K. Knabb** (1981) *Situationist International Anthology* (Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley): page 372
9. reprinted in the catalogue for the ICA exhibition: *An Endless Adventure* ... (1989) Ed. **I. Blazwick** (ICA/Verso, London). A more complete but poorly reproduced version appears in *Vague* (22)
10. **A. Khatib** (1958) *Essai de description psychogeographique des Halles Internationales Situationistes* (2). The whole run of *Internationale Situationiste* was reprinted in one volume in 1975 by Editions Champ-Libre (Paris)
11. **R. Hewison** (1989) *Future Tense: A New Art for the Nineties* (Methuen, London): page 28



Windfall is the name of an artists' initiative which has presented work in London (Hyde Park, 1987) and Bremen (1989), before organising the present project at the disused Seaman's Mission on the Broomielaw, in Glasgow. This project, the largest to date, involves 26 artists from 6 European countries, some of whom have taken part in previous Windfalls, others participating for the first time. Participation was in part determined by involvement in past projects and partly on invitation following an extensive research trip undertaken by **David McMillan**, who works in Greenock.

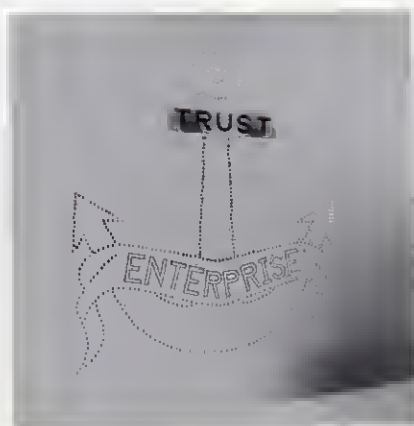
Ultimately, there is always a certain arbitrariness about who does and who does not participate in any given project, and the fact that, from a Scottish viewpoint, one notices certain absences in Windfall, absences which are really a reflection of the personalised, non-curatorial processes which determine its groupings at any given time. As Windfall makes no claim to be representative of anything other than a group which constitutes it at the time, it has a certain freedom of action, a spirit which refuses to place itself under anyone else's compunction. This gives the project as a whole a lightness and mobility which seems very appropriate to the moment. On the other hand it also means that important issues, the questions of how, why and who for, which are raised by art outside the gallery/site specific/public art can't be addressed in a consistent manner.

On the way to the Seaman's Mission, along the riverside and down the streets from Argyll Street, one can see the phrase '*Glasgow's Waterfront to the World*' repeated along the hoardings which surround soon-to-be-developed sites. The area, which escaped the 1960's excision of nearby Anderston, has been in long-term decline, and the new office buildings which have been completed are the current bright symbols of a changing area. The buildings belong to **Glasgow and Oriental** developers, who also own the Seaman's Mission and are the prime sponsors of Windfall. The next stage of development, in fact, will see the demise of the Mission, a simple rectangular two-storey brick building.

But it is that phrase which, in retrospect, sticks in the mind as rather satisfyingly apposite, given the connection between artists and developers. It could easily be an artwork itself, leaked out of the Seaman's Mission and wrapping a tentacle of irony around the neighbouring investment. It tells us something which, when it was true, no one needed to be told, when probably no one thought in such forms. Now the meaning of those simple words seems to have been inverted, referring inwards to the site, not out to the river. We know the words don't mean what they say. We know the phrase signifies only the aggrandisement of the developers and that its contemporary bombast serves to shine the 'profile' of the owners.

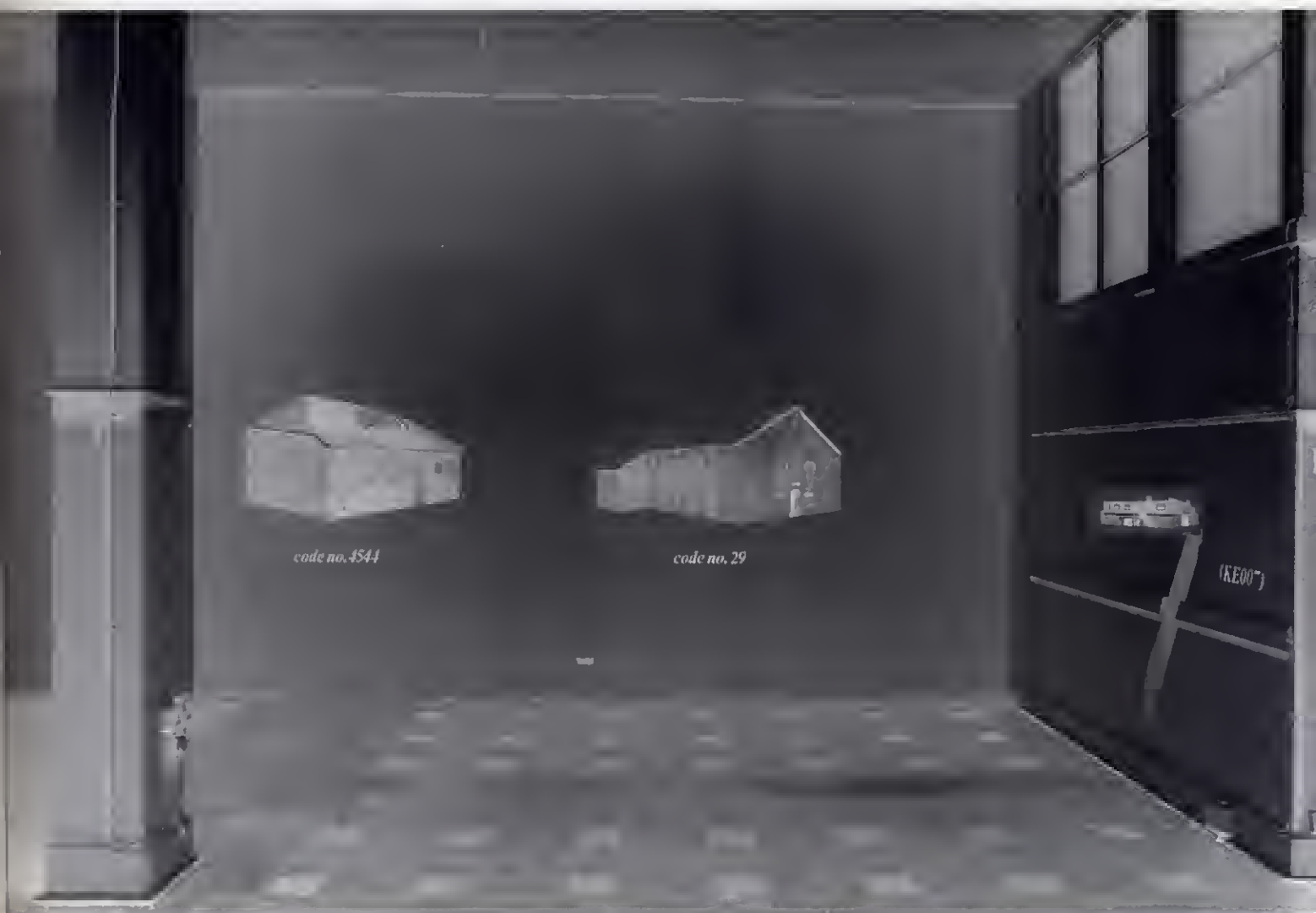
Such vacuity, or abuse of language and the concomitant set of implied values is one of the issues of 'context' which Windfall has had to negotiate. Appropriately the subject receives some attention from artists interested in the gap between words, meanings and values. **Elsie Mitchell**, for example, presents paintings like the immaculate signs of property-agents, beside a bland, brochure-like picture of high-rise blocks with post-modern pitched roofs. It is our capacity, carefully nurtured, to understand the unstated implication and to absorb the given values that she draws out.

Working 'outside the gallery' means the encounter with such powerful systems as advertising and behind that the interests of whatever company or bureaucracy. This encounter is usually characterised as a 'negotiation' in both senses; a steering across tricky ground and a formalised process of compromise. For Windfall, it is fortunate



David MacMillan Installation detail

TEXT: EUAN MacARTHUR



Julie Roberts Installation detail



Michael Lapuks Installation detail

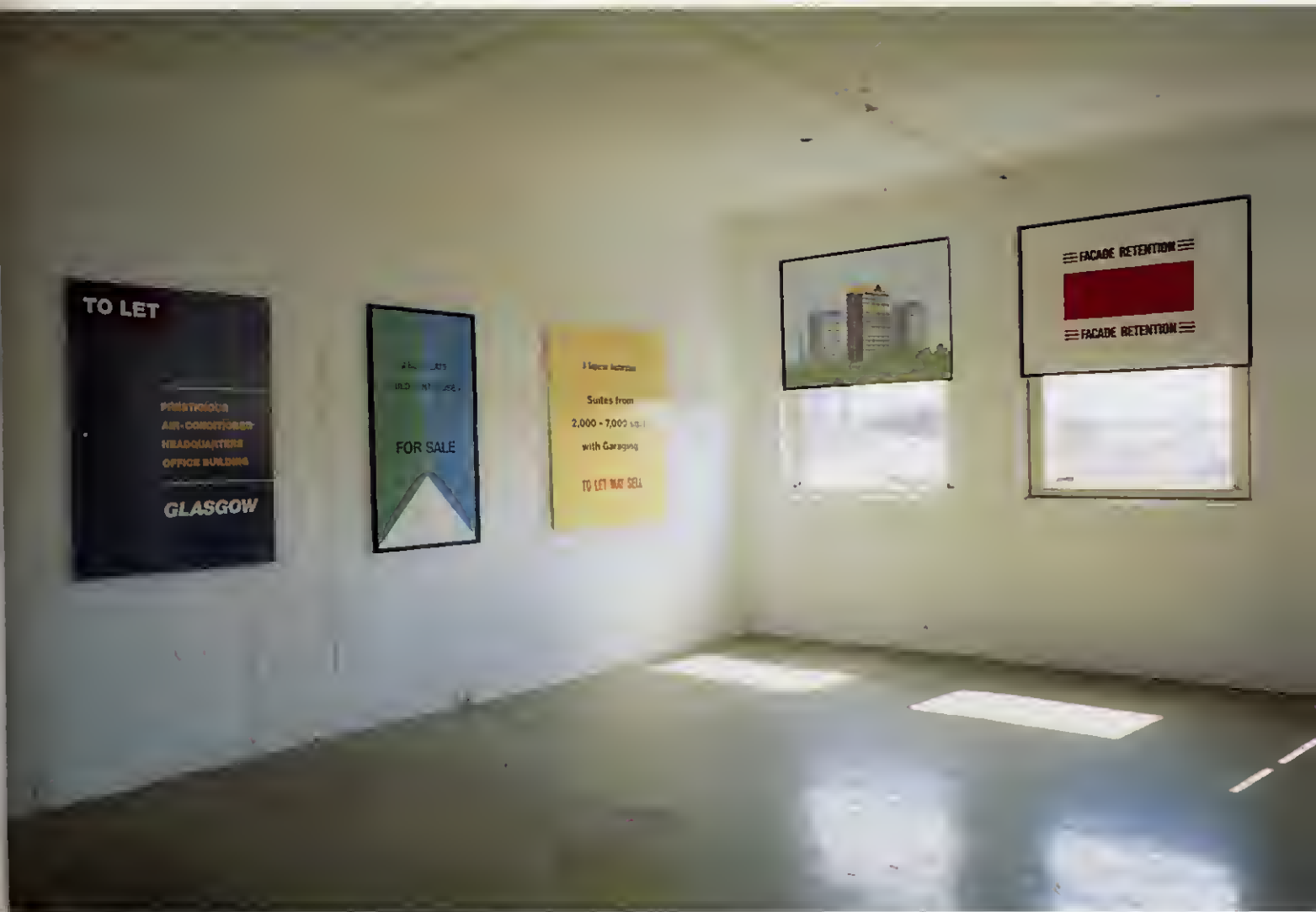
that there are artists whose interests lie in uncovering relationships of power and in making the hidden apparent. It is perhaps only through this that the integrity of any project outside the gallery can be shown to be intact. Art generates good, if not uncritical, publicity, like this, and no one likes to be merely a vehicle for another's purpose. Those who analyse context secure it for others to pursue their own interests. At the same time, Windfall seems to hold to a common-sensical viewpoint that suggests that the capacity for action could be lost by being too finical in one's attitude. The point is unresolved, as it has been to date, that in seeking the world outside the gallery, new concessions to 'context' are demanded, among them not least the issue of alien agendas. While advertising bombast shines the profile, art scrubs the shirt-tails. Windfall acknowledges this difficulty, and sensibly passes on to other things which are in its power to alter.

The characteristic attitude of Windfall is its relativism, whatever the views of individual participants. It is quite explicit that working outside the gallery is not necessarily a rejection of it. Some of the spaces in Windfall clearly refer back to the gallery. The attitude is one which recognises, potentially, all possible situations in which art may be made and seen, and recognises no final distinction between one or another. But there is a danger of a hidden conservatism here. The space for art becomes rather like that famous text of deconstruction which supports an infinity of 'readings', none with any claim to authority greater than another. Yet in this we see a problem for art and what it may reveal, criticise or 'challenge', but denied authority to change things, through influencing ideas and values, what can it be but a narcissistic indulgence? The difficulties surrounding permanent public art works and the preference for the temporary is partly a reflection of this condition, a paralysis at the heart of the liberal conscience. One possible way out of the relativist impasse is through site-specific public work, though this is also hedged with difficulties.

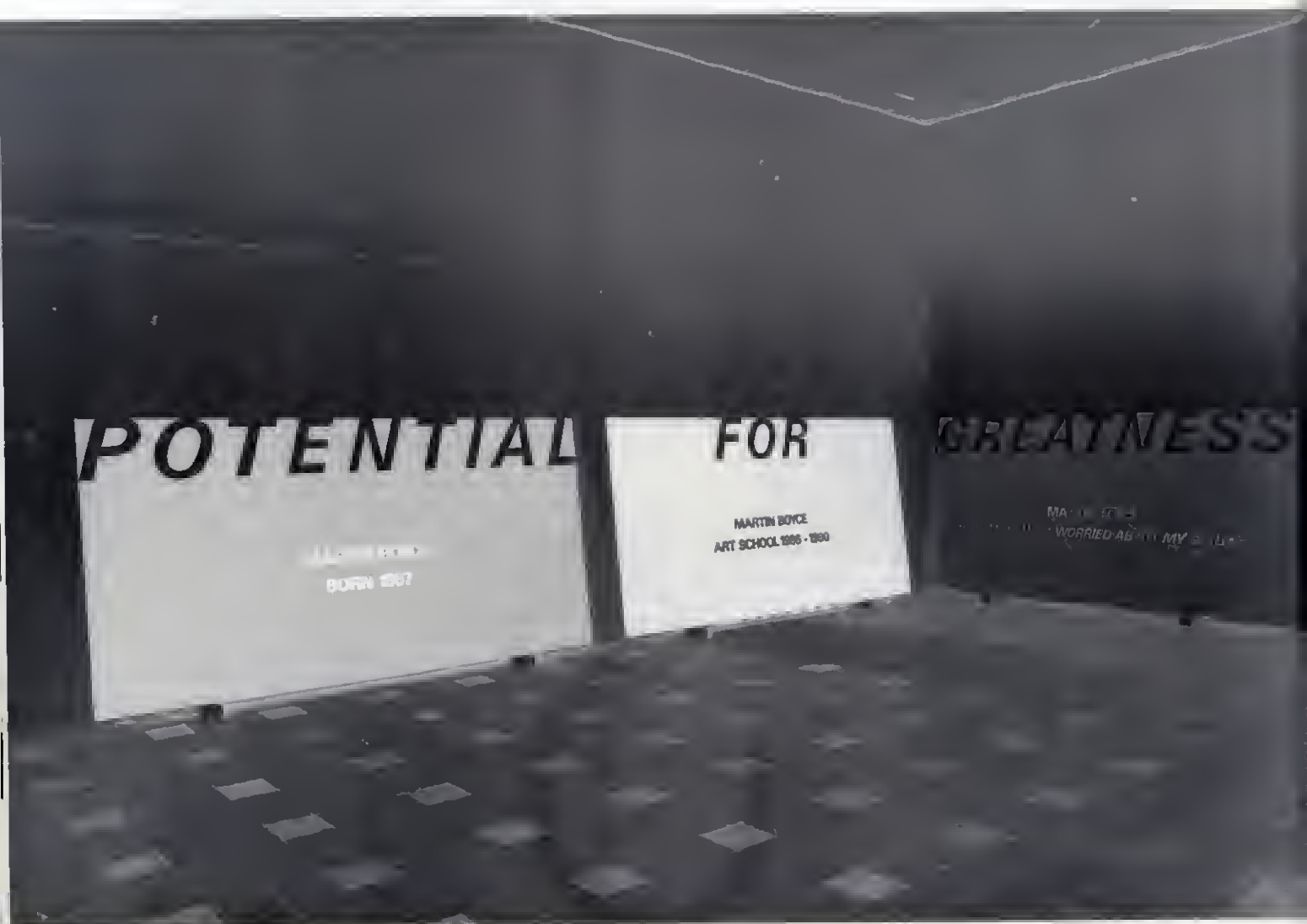
(I should perhaps make it plain that this paragraph doesn't intend a categorical statement about the individual works in Windfall, but is a speculation prompted by the structure of Windfall as an event.)

Such speculations arise from the diversity of Windfall's community, but are not overtly problematic to it. Windfall is designed to let artists get on with things. To experience the space of Windfall is to experience this condition in the concrete. As you move through it, it is a gallery, then it isn't, then it is again. It is a microcosm of various concepts, materials, practices, a society in which everything is tolerated; for on what basis can one claim validity over another? It is a microcosmic liberal society where internal differences are temporarily subdued by a larger shared interest, but simultaneously where individuals strive for visibility. In fact, it is through the unresolved tensions which it permits that Windfall achieves an extraordinary vitality, like the shape-changer's capacity to transform at will into something else. If it contradicts itself, so be it. In this, it is unintentionally eloquent about the position of artists in society at large.

On another point, Windfall is determinedly pragmatic: the problem of the vanishing public. If we have no right to believe we can define 'a public', or the capacity to identify the myriad possible 'publics', there is equally no use in trying to define a strategy to reach such elusive entities. 'Publicity' is indeed scattered, and those who turn up must make of things what they can. This is really again a consequence of Windfall being a sort of self-sustaining, rolling project, as much concerned with the experience the artists derive from working together as with the end result. In some measure, Windfall is quite self-concerned. However, one very attractive consequence of this is the notion of an international network of 'producers' – artists who initiate and participate – quite distinct from the network of curators, galleries and museums, the 'responders'. Empowering the artist in this fashion is fundamental to Windfall, irrespective of individual position or



Elsie Mitchell Installation detail



Martin Boyce Installation detail

For Windfall at the Seaman's Mission, the artists chose their own spaces in which to work. No authority was exercised over an artist's right to make what they pleased. As a curatorial process it is vindicated, for though there are very good works here, it is of *'Windfall'* that one continues to think. The building helps lend cohesion, for its banal spaces provide a clear but unobtrusive frame for the works. The building is divided into larger and smaller areas, of which the larger is considerably the more successful, despite an interesting work by **Claire Barclay** in the corridor of the smaller building.

Windfall appears so much as a whole, with so many connections to be made between different works and spaces, as to discourage a descriptive review. There are, however, issues or areas of concern which seem to link the content of certain works and suggest broad, but not exclusive, groupings under which it is reasonable to discuss particular works. There is, for example, the concern noted already, to use the space to 'refer' to the gallery or to frame the notion of 'museum culture' generally. Under this one could think of the work of Nathan Coley, Martin Boyce, Boris Achour, Douglas Gordon and Anita Drachman. There are those who take their cue, whether formal or contextual from the building itself, for example Julie Roberts, Achim Bertenburg, David McMillan or Claire Barclay. Other concerns include the nexus of language/meaning/value (Douglas Gordon again, David Allen, Elsie Mitchell, Craig Richardson), the old favourite: commodification of culture and cultural politics. Those artists whose work I already know in the main pursue existing concerns which are not specific to the building.

The first space of the main building is painted white. Both **Nathan Coley** and **Martin Boyce**, who share it, use the white walls in a distanced fashion, to 'locate' their work. Coley's large composite photographic work (untitled) appears as a screen floating across windows and wall. The bleached-out tones 'record' the walls and view beyond the window, flattening and unifying inside and out. It institutes a game about the security of knowledge, by concealing and revealing as representation, the world we 'know' is beyond. Its kick lies in freeing the photographic object from its supposed factuality and exposing the cultured trust we place in the probity of photographic images. Boyce's three canvases (green, blue and red), leaning against the wall in temporary fashion, apparently waiting to be raised and fixed, proclaim in large letters, a word on each panel, *POTENTIAL FOR GREATNESS*. The last also states, *I'm a little worried about my future*.

Douglas Gordon initiates a new series in three paintings on canvas which deploy catalogue or reference information relating to works by John Baldessari, Bernd and Hilla Becher, and Carl Andre. Each is accompanied by a label identifying the original work and the material of Gordon's own. On one level they seem to speak about the fetishisation of materials, but also the fetishisation of the absent object(s) referred to. Are these works addenda to the history of their referents? Are they separate and new? Are they also inescapably bound up with the glamour or aura of works by such 'solid gold' artists? These works are difficult to penetrate, but provocative.

Anita Drachman curates a museological display: seven brown cabinets, brown panelling, velvet drapes. Each cabinet contains a glass shelf. Its back is the greenish-toned window beyond which vague shapes pass. On each shelf are objects, precious and delicate, but also objects which hint of fate and danger: a gun, a tarot card, a miniature dragon. In one, viewers confront themselves in an oval mirror. An ambiguous narrative seems to connect the series, like a life reduced to ungraspable

Julie Roberts and **Achim Bertenburg** share a space, with **Blan Ryan** in an adjoining area. Their works related to each other through the notion of the exclusive or predominantly male space. Roberts painted three buildings (two directly on the wall on a blue ground, one on a small board projecting awkwardly into the space) in a 'factual', illustrational style. They are a Masonic Lodge, an Orange Lodge and a British Legion club, reinforcing the history and purpose of the Seaman's Mission, in which no doubt, women worked as cooks and cleaners to service the essentially male domain. I took this to be broadly the ground of Ryan's installation also. Bertenburg's response was somewhat more formal, taking a feature of the room, a square pillar, and almost enclosing it in walls of stacked newspapers, leaving barely space to squeeze inside. With its walls of yesterday's tabloid news, it seems to engage a perception of tedium, time spent sitting and waiting for something to happen.

David McMillan's area takes on the history of the place much more directly by painting it navy-blue, and revealing by the light of hidden windows the shape of an anchor and banner with the word *'enterprise'*. Above, on a timer, a lit sign flashes *TRUST*.

In absolute contrast to any of these, **Jim Hamlyn** pursues the artwork as pure phenomenon - the play of light reflected through rippling water in a ceiling-mounted glass tank. Simple, its means fully declared, it has an 'everchanging, neverchanging' fascination which seems to me a welcome event, as close to unmediated experience, perhaps, as art can get.

Michael Lapuks also manipulates light in a beautifully resolved installation which plays between the sensual contrast of large copper sheets, their corresponding mirror prints and a third level of (true) reflection, that of the prints seen again in the metallic surface. This final reflection reveals a quotation from Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* warning of the substitution of reality by its image.

An entirely different set of works and artists could be described to suggest the nature, strengths and weaknesses of Windfall. In sum, Windfall is a very substantial achievement, which in its own terms must be judged an impressive success. The effort and commitment required of artists to both organise and participate in such an event must be draining, and inevitably there will be questions as to whether such effort on such a scale is sustainable. The conditions which give rise to the need for artists initiatives will not disappear and may even intensify, and those close to the issues will need to consider what the next projects in Glasgow will be.

There is no desire, I think, amongst these artists to establish another layer of administration, to formalise their activities in any way, but rather a desire to be mobile and opportunistic. The negative of this, though, is that these events will always be a struggle, and the burden will be largely borne by young, energetic and committed people slightly on the outside of, though sympathetically viewed by, the professional systems which are already in place. Windfall presents convincing proof, as have other artist-led initiatives in Glasgow (the more recent of these being *The Living Room* and *The Bellgrove Billboard Project*), of the importance of such projects on whatever scale. As far as debates about the public nature of art outside the gallery is concerned, Windfall is essentially passive, but there is so much else contained in the project that I think such problems are outweighed. If Windfall raises questions which are not resolved, its defence must be that it neither went out to suppress particular difficulties or to resolve them: they are taken as the condition, the ground, in which art today must be made.



Review

Available Resources

June/July 1991, Derry.

A *Available Resources* was prepared over the last year or so by the former director of the Orchard Gallery, **Declan McGonagle** in collaboration with artists **Brian Connolly** (main coordinator), **Brian Kennedy**, **Alastair MacLennan** and **Nick Stewart**. They decided on the list of invited artists, considering the obvious problems: how many men and women, how many from the South and North of Ireland in addition they wished to develop established contacts with Italy, Canada, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. The organisers made applications for funding (receiving at the end £7,600 for the 16 artists).

McGonagle, before becoming the Director of the **Irish Museum of Modern Art**, formulated the main idea of the project as '*unlimited resources within limited financial resources*'. The group agreed on three more shared ideas: 1) East Meets West, 2) a broad spectrum of artistic and cultural experience, 3) involvement of the 'public'.

The first to finish a work was a Polish performance artist **Zygmunt Piotrowski** working under the name **Pio Trowski**. His performances (one in Derry on Saturday 29th June, the unexpected, unannounced second in Belfast on Monday 1st July) took place at dawn (3am), not just for metaphorical reasons. *The Stalker*, the name of the work in Derry, suggests Trowski's severe manipulation of the audience. Trowski prepared the shed in the back of the yard of Adairs (the former funeral parlour) by washing its floor. The smell of the wet, old and dusty shed was an important ingredient of, what he called, the "*time of place*". The duration of the smell, as it slowly evaporated, echoed the slow motion videos (three) of his slowly moving head. He walked and turned

slowly among them. Was the slowness desirable or despicable? It seems it was both. His earlier work documented in numbered catalogues suggests the positive quality of being motionless or slow.

Among the last actions of the project were an 8 am workshop lead by **Alana O'Kelly** titled *A Resounding Well* and a performance *All Over Walls* by **Nick Stewart**. D'Kelly's session at the prehistoric fort outside Derry was dedicated to making various 'calls'. People were asked to experiment with their voices. Stewart was dressed in a shroud made of pages of the regional telephone directory and carried a bucket of mud. The other hand was bandaged to a bundle of oak branches used to dip in the mud and whip the chosen walls. He walked from a waste ground ablaze with purple weed to Adairs. A room which was earlier prepared served as the 'station of his cross'. He crawled out of the shroud as if being a chrysalis, unwound the bandage, cast it out of the open sash window, knelt in front of the fireplace and proceeded to hit the firebasket with his fist. It hurt both him and the audience. Where D'Kelly explored the celebratory power of art, of sound, Stewart explored its power of accusation. Where Trowski asked "*does not emptiness between I and thou create the person itself.*" Stewart proposed to dismantle the wall between I and thou urging us to choose the right targets, not the easy ones.

If Stewart proposed that meditation often results in a flow of experiences which attenuate the ego and its unity with that which is, **Pauline Cummins** combined that with some exploration of art as healing. Her *Inch by Inch*, an unfinished work, started at Inch in Co. Kerry and continued at Inch Island near Derry to be continued back in Co. Kerry again. She moves in the area looking for found natural objects that might complement objects she makes (masks) in a way beneficial to the psyche bruised by the history of division and hate. "*I have a snake coiled up inside my breast. It is made of accumulated hurt*", but where Stewart made the hurt explicit and general, she distrusts the received view of 'the Irish problem' and is putting forward the idea of moving away from it even if it is only 'inch by inch'.

Several of the works used 'the past' as a theme. **Fran Hegarty's Teanga** - unedited reminiscences of Gaelic speakers, the fragments of which present her as an elegant 'master' of composition with the capacity to hit a raw nerve: e.g. moving away from her seated mother, Fran's arm elongates into a precarious link that might snap. **Anne Bean** chose to include her baby son in a late night performance on the theme of mother and child. While holding him on her lap she used her free hand to whiten a sheet of glass, thus enabling it to accept a projected image of mother and child, two more reproductions of famous iconic representations were pinned on the walls (one of them being a cropped Raphael Santi).

If the subtext to the *Available Resources* event was that sustainable use of local resources is what life

PROJECT



is, then the artists in this project translated that understanding into the language of seeing, hearing, smelling, relaxed walking, standing quietly, re-inventing uses for thrown-away things. **Tomas Ruller** did this superbly in two rooms at Adairs, one on the first floor, the other near the shed where Trowski, **John Ford** and Hegarty worked at times, and where two Saturday seminars were held which explored the context and the benefit of such an international project.

In his piece, Ruller swept the room clean and then sat silently in front of the window which looked out onto a yard. On his right side an old globe and a ladder, between him and the door a metal object, a part of something recognisable but undergoing a sort of Kafkaesque metamorphosis. In the ground floor room, on the sickly green carpet Ruller scattered children's playing bricks, some of which made a dark red pool on the floor larger. The rest of the liquid rested in a stainless steel bowl, above which an old drip bottle hung from a circular light fitting. In the far corner, as if in remembrance of Jan Zrzavy (a Czech painter) a glass filled with wine-like liquid stood guard next to a dark green bottle. The importance of meditation was, perhaps, highlighted by the aggressivity of the large stain at the door. The reference to a hospital may be autobiographical (Ruller survived a very serious car accident). The sickle sticking out of the wall, its sharp end buried in it, perhaps a reference to the symbols of a culture that marginalized his work on ideological grounds.

Brian Kennedy employed pristine white plaster either filling in cracks, or white shapes covering some real or imagined blemish on the wall. He called it *Remains Intact* suggesting a strong sense of irony vis-a-vis the juxtaposition of old and new. In part, the strategy of minimal interference was used by **Angelo Garoglio**, at Adairs, called *Medesimo* (Same). The chimney had been scribbled over by someone before - the more recognizable were sketches for a family tree of his fellow artist **Brian Connolly**, whose installation was in a room above. Around the dates and names, Garoglio made a pentagon, a recognizable reference to our classical tradition, but also to the less clear alchemy and complex meaning of **Durer's** *Melancholia*. Alongside one of the pentagon sides were a handful of black drawings on - what looked like - acetate or faxes which led the work back into the Fine Art tradition. This was interrogated on the opposite wall, where five black drawings on expensive paper were placed above two composite double exposure cibachromes. Two large sheets of glass leaned against the wall partly covering the photographs, partly reflecting a side window and viewer alike. The transformation of the room from a heap of old rubbish into a sophisticated 'high art' environment was very convincing. The two sheets of glass became an available resource after Garoglio's departure for Anne Bean. Similarly Ruller's globe appeared at the following weekend in front of the monument to the dead soldiers in the middle of the

Diamond, Derry's main square. This time it became a part of an unannounced performance by **Alastair MacLennan**, who also made a spacious installation at the top of the Adairs. On the walls of a room he placed birth certificates of unnamed persons born each day of this year (some viewers thought of them as death certificates, to the artist's delight). In the room a large oak tree referred to the story of Derry, presenting a cliché. Above it and just under the roof, MacLennan hoisted two blackened flags, the Union Jack and the Irish Tricolour. The serious erasing of differences by black was lifted onto a level of farce by two wellington boots placed in a bucket each full of water. But other aspects, such as leather whips, introduced sinister overtones.

Louise Walsh, an Irish artist, studied the history of Derry, and among other things, became aware of the special role the city's women have historically had: both to earn a living (in a shirt factory) and in bringing up their families. This led her to make drawings in a shirt factory. The women from the factory turned up in large numbers for the opening at the Orchard Gallery and 400 of them went to an opening the day before at the factory. Inevitably Walsh stands at the opposite end to *The Stalker*, but both used references to traditionally 'women's work'.



Thomas Ruller



Nick Stewart *All Over Walls*

Brian Connolly, born in the vicinity of Derry and a dedicated co-ordinator of the project, made his installation at Adairs. *In Remembrance* was a collection of used objects, underneath a family tree made out of inter-connected coat hangers. As if in a gesture of friendship, Connolly developed Garoglio's motive of drawings on acetate. Or did it happen the other way round? The difference between regional art and international art disappeared as another myth. There was an absence of competition: Connolly gave MacLennan some acorns, Ruller's globe was re-used by MacLennan, Garoglio's glass by Anne Bean. Their work became an available resource in more than one meaning.

Slavka Sverakova



The Last Weekend

Alston. June 21st-23rd.

Alston, 'the highest market town in England', provided the setting for *The Last Weekend*, a three day event of live art presented by the *Edge Biennale Trust* and coinciding with the summer solstice. Eleven artists from Britain and Europe were invited to make work for this rural location, situated on the Pennine Way and occupying a position of particular isolation. It was chosen for a number of reasons; set in beautiful scenery, Alston is small yet offers enough facilities to accommodate an international gathering of this sort. It was also felt by the organisers that although the community is very mixed, in some senses it is quite highly developed in terms of understanding arts and crafts. The intention however, was not so much to do an event for the rural community as to use Alston as one might a conference centre, utilising rural sites and materials and in some cases address rural issues.



The irony of the title, aside from its calendar reference, was in presenting a particular position within live art curatorship; a reply, almost, to the National Review of Live Art and a continuation by Edge to address certain themes, such as *Art and Life in the Nineties* last year. This proposal of finality was even echoed in some of the works presented at the Weekend. Andre Stitt's **Cairns** (*aka the past is entombed in the present*) was a good example: in a dried up river bed he constructed two large pillar-like structures from aggregate and cement, which were then spotlit at night. One contained items of personal detritus, such as fast food packaging, collected over a number of years, whilst a few feet away, the other had natural materials - layers of grass, earth, leaves and so on - enmeshed in the concrete. It was a good setting for cairns: the exhumation in the former one looked strangely geological in parts, such as a vein of small medicine bottles. However, any sympathy for the site ended there and plans by the artist to conclude the piece by smashing the plinths with a jackhammer were deemed inappropriate for the setting.

In terms of producing work which successfully appropriated rural associations and activity, the piece by **Stefan Gec** was well received. It principally involved a display of falconry with two birds - a peregrine and a saker - flying both individually and together to a lure. Each bird wore two bells made of brass salvaged from Soviet submarines currently being scrapped at Blyth. Metal from these vessels had been used in a previous piece by Gec, fashioned into bells and suspended at the water line from the High Level Bridge on the River Tyne. The continuation of the idea into the air was also compounded by the knowledge that, the birds names had been adopted by the armaments industry. For example the 'saker' was a form of cannon. The bells attached to the falcon's legs were surprisingly audible as they flew around the confines of a school playing field. It was a display of sheer beauty and was one of the few performances to noticeably attract a local audience.

With the *Last Weekend*, Edge has continued in its aim to bring international artists to Britain, showing work by young as well as more established practitioners. Of the latter, **Wink Van Kempen** from Holland presented two similar pieces, in the Quaker meeting house and on the shingled banks of the river. Both involved a highly idiosyncratic approach, asking the audience to comment on and name a number of small decorated whips and then arrange these on the ground in a circular formation. It was particularly effective in the tiny building, thick with incense, where the onset of darkness meant the audience were obliged to describe the whips through touch. A refreshingly playful and witty approach to sexuality was explored, one that benefited surprisingly from the context.

Unfortunately, this was not the case with some of the other European artists for whom one senses the lack of site visits beforehand resulted in work that was disappointingly slight. **Kees Mol's** performance was a manic series of actions: chaining his foot to a raft, causing the word 'veil' to combust on a block of ice and setting fire to his sleeve, all while smoking, drinking and playing rock music. He was partly accompanied by Van Kempen, seated in an armchair reading German, and the unexpected presence of an over excited dog. The piece did have its moments, presenting a hyper-real narrative of loneliness, yet the siting of this aggressive work in a village hall seemed inappropriate.

The exposed hilltop site for **John Jordan's** *Bury them and be silent* on the other hand was integral to the work. Despite apparently inspiring the wrath of some of the members of the Alston community, the accumulated action over three days of digging 42 graves for each day of the Gulf War whilst a tape of the Victory Parade was broadcast, made for a powerful work. It culminated in a ritualistic burning of earth filled bags which had been placed in each of the graves and printed with the names and

economic values of companies involved in the conflict.

Issues around the Gulf War were also touched on in *Tree Line Poison Well* by **Nick Stewart**, sited in a derelict mill by the side of the river. In two parts, the first involved the artist, clad in black, kneeling on top of a wall of the building and staring out across a meadow to the war memorial, meditatively raising and lowering a strip of bandage in the wind. Inside, the same material connected a small willow tree to a well, filled with oil and surrounded with lead, to suggest overflow. The focus of elevation/inversion of tree and well was shifted in the later performance when the nettles, which had previously clogged the interior, were cut down, bundled with lead ribbons and affixed to an interior wall. Stewart, blindfolded, was connected by the same taut fabric to the well and tension was created as he struggled to retrieve what was weighed down. A lead box was salvaged, cut open with a stanley knife and the revealed contents of newspapers arranged. Whilst it was apparent that these Guardian headlines concerned the Gulf War, the action of indexing and folding them left no time to locate specifics. These papers were then shoved into niches in the wall, below the nettles, and incinerated.

Associated relationships between Alston's lead mining history and wider issues of industry and waste, coupled with the controlled intensity of the latter performance made this a particularly interesting work. On the other hand it is impossible to know how the piece *Customary Ways* by **Gillian Dyson** would have progressed had not one of the disgruntled audience broken down the door of the barn into which we had been herded and commanded to "*listen to ourselves*". As it was, the brief moments in the darkened barn were enjoyable, an accordion was played and conversation levels did sound somewhat ovine, but

in the ensuing discussion, surrounding a pen of frightened sheep, the artist's defensive refusal to answer questions left many feeling angry. If the intention was indeed to irritate and annoy, the piece so far as it went was successful, yet ultimately remained unchannelled and lacking. Ironical, therefore, that some members of the audience who disliked being rounded up as Edge punters, chose to go and see some of the sheep dog trials, which along with a mountain bike rally and a flower festival, were also taking place that weekend.

An important part of the reasoning behind the Last Weekend was in presenting work in the context where it would be upfront and challenging and so avoid the tendency of invisibility in the usual urban centres. Inevitably however this results in conflict, so it was unfortunate that the weekend did not allow for a forum of (public) debate where vocal opponents of some of the works, notably the vicar, could air their views rather than in the local papers. It is unfortunate also that the generally bad weather and inaccessibility of some sites meant the audience had to be bussed to and fro, and so isolated themselves as Edge audience (already alienated following violent attacks on the opening night).

The piece which literally transcended some of these problems was **Ann Bean's**, presented close to midnight on the saturday. From a high vantage point on the Pennine Way one could see a number of helium filled balloons slowly appear in the field below. Each contained a coloured luminous fishing marker and formed a huge (crop) circle. When this was complete, the balloons were released to sail off above Alston and beyond. Apparently inspired by the high incidence of UFO sightings on this stretch of the Pennine Way, it was an invocation of great beauty and provided a memorable highlight to the weekend.

Louise Wilson

Artists Initiatives:

Belfast 1990-91

In Belfast there are few, if any, artspace or organisations willing to foster an awareness of 'innovative' art and promote contemporary artists. There is a history, however, of trying to redress this imbalance: from the late '70's The Crescent Arts Centre, followed in the early '80's the A.R.E. (Art & Research Exchange) pushed forward the possibilities for experimental work in Ireland. The Crescent, after being closed for approximately five years, is about to be relaunched, though its new direction is as yet unknown. The A.R.E., after making a deliberate attempt to promote art outside of the gallery

institution ceased to exist after having its funding axed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, despite a vociferous campaign.

It is this same funding body that runs one of the only spaces available to show work in - The Arts Council Gallery. This gallery, like many, does not implement a constructive exhibition policy, with applicants having to wait on a list for two or three years before exhibiting. Work selected is largely of an unchallenging wall-based nature with the bookshop and cafe appearing to take precedence.

This lack of support for the cultural development of the city has lead some artists to recently take up the initiative from a position of artistic self-determination.

In September 1990 three artists - **Brian Connolly**,



Brian Kennedy (formerly a co-ordinator of A.R.E.) and **Alistair MacLennan** - were invited to give talks to local artists and students on their respective art practices. This came about from an invitation by **Mo Bates**, the recently appointed co-ordinator of the Old Museum Arts Centre who saw the post as a 'pioneering task to develop the Old Museum as an important contemporary arts centre which would become a resource available to people from any part of Belfast irrespective of their socio-economic and cultural background and level of experience in the arts . . .'. The artists structured this event as a talk on art outside the gallery and re-channelled the evening into an open forum on art practice, putting forward the notion of regular meetings with discursive topics.

The meetings that ensued involved a cross-section of art students, recently 'qualified' and working artists discussing work, funding, ideas and action. The group who met together were not formally structured and intentionally gave themselves no coherent name or distinct objectives. Artists generally operated on their own, though some collaborative projects emerged. Two of these projects involved a photocopied magazine/artists book put together during some of the meetings for limited distribution, and a temporary public work co-ordinated by **Blanithnaid Ryan**. The latter involved a text - *Bridge That Gap* - which was stencilled on the pavements of the Ormeau Bridge which joins two Catholic and Protestant areas separated by the River Lagan. This work gave a message of hope that ironically and intentionally was washed away by the rain.



The most ambitious project coming out of this group activity, however, was the planning and presentation of a *Live Work Weekend*. This had been timetabled into the Old Museum Arts Centre's Spring programme before the untimely dismissal of Mo Bates from the staff. This three-day event occurred in March 1991 and was billed as 'experiments with time-based works of art, including performance, temporary installation, video and multi-media' and included an abundance of artworks in and around the building.



Alistair MacLennan used the road in front of the Museum for a mournful work in which he poignantly attached black and white ribbons and other objects to a sapling tree every hour on the hour for the duration of the event. In the yard of the building, a slow moving piece by three artists collaborating for the first time - **Michael Donaghy**, **Amanda Dunsmore** and **Tony Patrickson** - reflected issues of femininity and masculinity in a semi-intuitive and at times clumsy, performance. In doors one of the more compelling video works, 'Empire State' by **Michael Kierney** dealt with the interrelation of U.S. Foreign Policy and multinational investment with the dramatic, if not sensationalist, use of documentary footage of client state strife. In the common-room area where a food bar had been orchestrated by **Janine Tamburrini**, **Richard Livingstone** was constantly destroying a number of paintings, sawing, cutting and then packaging them into small plastic bags before labelling and attaching them to the small gallery wall, whilst **Ben Allen**, with some active spectators, was arranging large drawings by overlaying thousands of multiples of scenic postcards on the carpeted floor. Amongst many other durational and temporary pieces was a beautiful floor drawn work by **Nuala Gregory**, of light sensitive pigment arranged in a semi-repeat pattern reminiscent of ornate stained glass, which was viewed from a platform under an ultra-violet light.

Although the atmosphere of the weekend was a valuable and an uplifting experience for a lot of the viewers and participating artists, there seemed to be some resentment from the staff of the museum who treated the event as peripheral and as such effectively managed to suppress one work from even happening.

The struggle for artists to commit themselves to making, organising and promoting work which takes a stance outside institutionally validated views or traditions seems crucial today if there is to be a healthy future for art practices. A second event is already being organised.

Evan Sutherland

Intervals

Glasgow, May 1991.

Collectively titled *Intervals*, daylight was the connection between three site specific installations by **Trecy Meckenna**, **Jim Buckley** and **Phil Powers** in MacKenna's temporary studio in Glasgow's East End. Each artist's work was on view for a week between 4-31 May. The room had 22' white walls and a high ceiling. Facing the door, a 13' by 22' gridded window looked onto a graveyard and horse chestnut trees. The overwhelming light of the sun and blinding whiteness reflected on the walls, presented a challenge for the artists in how best to use this.

The window panes gave a clue to the underlying structure of Mackenna's installation '*Interval May 1991*'. Four 9' long cubes of white sheeting hung from the ceiling in the centre, dissipating the light and casting shadows, these stopped in line with a lower window ledge, their diameter matching the window panes. At eye level a series of red sinuous lines was traced on the walls. Four gilt framed photographs featuring a dark, ambiguous, interior space hung on the left wall. To the right, against the wall, stood four 3½' high steel stands. Twenty four suitcase labels were pinned to each surface, each contained an 'autonomous statement. Certain references reappeared: light, dust, collecting, shifting of objects in space. A constant feature of Mackenna's work has been the deployment of discreet abstract elements which coalesce into an unsaid reading or experience... This remains, but the project has changed. Here the artist is no longer a maker, but a revealer. Sheets operate like Proust's *Madeleine*, the taste of which transported him back to childhood, however while every visitor will have their involuntary memories of sheets, of sun in a room, other aspects of the installation remained over private and perhaps unfocused.

In Power's installation, *The Day Begins*, red and green were used to link the piece formally and associatively. Three words 'The Day Remains' were made from LEDs (light emitting diodes) and hung at eye level in the middle of the room. 'The' was lit in green, 'Day' flashed on/off in pale pink, while 'Remains' was in red. Successfully condensing the mood of the room, the pale pink 'Day' worked with flat light rather than competing with it. A dynamic relationship was achieved between inside and outside as the visitor's reading of the room altered simultaneously with the changing light. The LEDs obliteration by sunlight enunciated the sheer force of white. The left wall featured a red photograph of a young fox by a stone wall, while a green photograph of the budding foliage of a horse chestnut tree hung on the right wall. A strong invisible conversation or current ran between the two, bringing the wilderness indoors and establishing unexpected equivalencies. Here blinding

daylight is associated with a pulsing electricity and a throbbing, bestial world. All are wild and independent of human volition and all co-exist. Cut out of acetate, a red circle and a green celtic cross were stuck to separate parts of the window. A typed text describing the artist's response to the space had been photocopied onto transparent A4 acetate and also attached to the windows. The circle and cross served a reflexive function, locating the window, and introducing yet another complimentary linguistic system into a multi-faceted installation. However, while the text inserted the artist's persona into the installation, a clumsy presentation distracted slightly from what was otherwise a subtle and considered artwork.



Philip Powers *The Day Begins*

Buckley's piece was viewed through an inserted eyehole in the locked studio door. The viewer could see a miniature corridor, with light literally at the end of the tunnel, since it looked straight onto the studio window. The grid of the window frame stopped the aperture going off into infinity, and by this means used the space itself. Grey skirting board brought scale, and walls of broad, vertical black and yellow stripes introduced space and depth through interval. Also changing with light, this piece worked with the formal properties of the construction. Unlike Buckley's other eyehole works, this piece did not employ anecdote to create readings or effects, and is a step forward. At the same time the visitor is denied sculpture's conventional properties since it is not possible to touch the work or walk around it.

Ocurring within Mayfest, Glasgow's annual arts festival, this self-generated initiative was organised independently of it. Not surprisingly it was by far the most interesting visual arts event of the month, highlighting the lack of amenities for speculative, enquiring work in Glasgow. Scottish artists of very different orientations are increasingly opting for installations in non-gallery spaces. While a market and sponsorship oriented approach can be forced on the public galleries, artists (who are for the most part able administrators of their careers) can simply vote with their feet and establish their own exhibitions circuit.

Fiona Byrne Sutton

NEXUS:

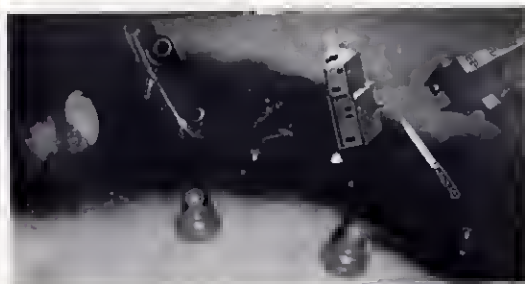
The Eighth National Live Art Events Week. Hull, May 1991.

Traditionally organised by first year students of **Humberside Poly's Fine Art Department** the festival seems to have grown in number of events and the professionalism of its contributors. Organisational ups and downs included the rescheduling of **Hanna O'Shea's** performance at short notice and a non-arrival of equipment forced a concentrating of two film and video viewings into one. A theoretical appraisal of the nationwide state of live art by **Lois Keiden** (ACGB Live Arts Officer) offered two main observations: first that there is a dichotomy between the established notion of performance art (stage, concert platform, etc.) for the cultural public at large, and the performance artist's concept. So much so that the Arts Council has reified the differences not only between those perceptions but also between the ageing ideas of performance art arising in the late fifties and sixties and today's practices of live art, by creating a new post - that of Officer for Live Arts. **Robert Hughes's** adjective 'messy' seemed to indicate a strong characteristic of live art in its unpredictability, preparedness to challenge preconceptions and its ability to live with 'failure'.

In that immediate context and across thirteen venues, the festival provided eighteen performances, ten installations, three workshops, one demonstration, three exhibitions, Indian dance, Castilleian music and twenty-six videos/films. Free entry to all save two events should have drawn a greater public participation.

My restricted view took in **La Musgana**, **Inside Out Theatre**, a spray can demonstration, **New Videos from Hull**, **New and Experimental Film**, **Richard Layzell**, **Tony Archer's** photography, **Mike Stubbs'** installation, the **Mail Art** exhibition, **The Importance of Being Frank (The Men's Group)**, **Laurence North's** card construction and **Lois Keiden's** awarenesses. **Hanna O'Shea**, for me, fell victim to change of circumstance.

The power of live art to create immediate entertainment and pleasurable shock was a virtue of **Inside Out Theatre's** presentation of James Bond's escapades. Masks and balletic manoeuvrings gave instant characterisation and sustained a lively pace.



The Men's Group. Photos by Martin Haycock

It lived within the genre and seemed an affectionate appraisal rather than a deconstruction of myth or assumption. **La Musgana**, 1988 winner of Spain's National Folk Music Festival were surprised by the rapidity with which their medieval music moved the audience to vigorous dancing: - a unique and unsheduled feature of this Hull performance and a good instance of creative provincial nonconformism.

New Videos from Hull and **New and Experimental Film** showed that there is currently a widespread adoption of analogy as a way of dealing with issues. Sexual discrimination and cultural identity were central concerns in two works of vastly different character and premises. **The Tongue (Fool Story Films)** set out to be a horror movie (actors and object animation), within the eventual growth of the said tongue terrorizing various occupants of a terrace house. The comic strip characterisations of this symbol of male domination propelled it to a quick denouement. A raw-edged movie that recommended itself immediately to a mid-twenties audience and could well find itself wider circulation.

You Be Mather (Serah Pucill) reveals a face projected onto a cup, saucer, and teapot on a table top. The revelation is oblique and at various levels of visual ambiguity, recalling both the images of Bosch and the procedural theory of paranoid critical perception broadcast by Dali. Recurrent ambiguities, spatial dislocations of the eye, nose and mouth are combined with a self-empowering and recalcitrant teapot which resists the controlling hand. All identities are in jeopardy, a cup's is lost when seen as a face, a saucer's when it becomes a mouth. The title may direct attention to traditional social expectations that women should do everything (for the family, home and society) and somehow still manage to be themselves. Its situation is certainly that of a domestic battleground.

New concerns, however, are expressed in old materials on this occasion. Men see themselves lacking an adequate role model. There is also, for them, no supporting social organisation or framework for action such as women have created in feminism. This need for a positive identification is the basis of **The Men's Group**, whose drawings, paintings etc., chart their exploration of male social relationships and responsibilities. The inclusion of young marrieds and parents gives these concerns actual and immediate focal points and pressures. Their question, and one echoed by Alan McLean, is "What is it to be a man? How should a man act?" Aged pre-Thirty something, educators and artistic leaders, they may already be signalling a real and unexpected social crisis.

In all, very varied, technically accomplished and ambitious work, by putative or practising professionals could be picked up at any point in the week. Time alone was the enemy.

Malcolm Cook

Asphalt Rundown

(Sheffield Contemporary Arts Trust),
Sheffield, 19/20/21st July 1991.

Asphalt Rundown placed three performance/installation artworks in non-gallery spaces across Sheffield. The artists involved, **John Jordan**, **Marie Hyde**, and **Jonnie Wilkes** all eschewed the glibly re-vamped city centre to explore relatively marginal spaces: Wilkes painted a sequence of numbers beside the dead rubble of an old steel works, Jordan made journeys along the bed of a river, cleaning it as it ran across the west side of town, and Hyde distributed two thousand specially made carrier bags in the rather grim Sheaf and Castle markets.

A project like this one sees the city as a battleground of meaning, a text in which all players must compete to order or re-frame. Of course the city text proper is a weird fusion of the past and the present, the commercial and the public, the ideological and the concrete, the hidden and the revealed. In the language game that is the city each utterance serves to alter the meaning of its peers, its forebears and its followers.

So, at each of the sites for *Asphalt Rundown* reality in the city of Sheffield underwent a bit of a bend, got made to flicker, got actively re-framed. Gallery works may invoke a dialogue between the actual and the representational but they rarely create one (or stage one?) in the absolute terms of site-specific installation and performance. Indeed, in each of these works meaning only really arose at all from the collision of artwork and the environment; each work taking its place, and speaking its piece in a living, changing culture.

Most dramatic in this sense was perhaps John Jordan's *Vein Voices*, in which the day-time actions of journeying and cleaning the river led to a series of night time performances at the end of London Road. Saturday's late night performance was nicely offset by a nearby altercation in which gangs of lads and police rehearsed strategic runs, yells, retreats and huddles into the small hours. All this, of course, leant weight to Jordan's aura of concentrated vulnerability, articulating the dissonance between his discrete, metaphorical intervention in the psychic health of the city and the day-to-day workings of its streets. Watching Jordan one sensed a well constructed, resonant project that was both intensely social (cleaning a river, talking to the public and to visitors) and utterly private (three cold nights without sleep on a bed above water, long journeys alone down dark enclosed water-ways underground).

Marie Hyde's work also spoke of the frail existence of a private image within an intensely commercial context but though her text and photo works on polythene bags raised questions about memory and

marginal voices they didn't seem to engage with their context (as polythene bags) as well as they might have done. That said, her text '*skin/peel/slowly/so does my memory*' worked extremely well since in using an inferior print process Hyde allowed the letters to peel from the bag, and left one arriving home with something, although messy, at least as flawed and partial as one's perception of the past.



Marie Hyde

Perhaps most successful in Hyde's project was that in focusing attention on polythene bags, it abruptly shifted the balance of one's perception, bringing a single banal element out to the front for hallucinatory inspection. I spent time in the market, looking for the bags and seeing many others, thinking about how we buy, get, use, keep and re-use bags, thinking about design, imagining the life story of a single bag etc: all light but valuable thoughts. This was modest work, marred by a difficulty in getting traders to accept the bags, but it affirmed that ideas can live in small things, that a discrete, viral attack on the city can be as resonant as an all-out assault.

Jonnie Wilkes' work seemed at first most cryptic and was certainly the most playful of the three. I examined his sequence of numbers denoting record times for sporting events without knowing what they were. Lacking declared reference they made a vaguely pleasing puzzle as one considered their relation to their site in Atercliffe. Were they scientific or pseudo-scientific? Did they represent the time it took to create various steel articles in the steel works now demolished? Did they represent the time it took to walk from the road to the site? Or did they have no reference? Learning their true origin provoked a tighter response, raising as it did, the relation between old, industrial Sheffield and its leisure culture descendant (The project coincided with the World Student Games). In a perfect example of how works like this can re-make meaning from the text of the city itself, Wilkes threw up a dialogue between three time scales; pitching the short times of sporting exertion against both the long time of social history (invoked by the demolished steel works) and the very long time of matter itself (present as rubble and stone).

Tim Etchells.

Review

Representing Scotland?

From Limelight to Satellite: A Scottish Film Book. Edited by Eddie Dick, published by the Scottish Film Council and the British Film Institute. £12.95 (paperback). ISBN 085170 282 1.

Billed as a 'Scottish Film Book' - as distinct from 'video':
'... essential reading for everyone interested in the delights and difficulties of making and understanding movies' (p.9). From Limelight to Satellite immediately sets itself a daunting task. Indeed the book is unique in its fully illustrated attempt to give historical and contemporary insight into a flimsy and tightly controlled Scottish film industry. The editor Eddie Dick, Media Education Officer at the Scottish Film Council, explains in his introduction that the book:

'is not a definitive history of film in Scotland. It is a gathering of essays and pictures which form a historical and contemporary mosaic of Scottish film. A kind of mosaic in which each piece makes its individual sense but where the totality blends into a fuller impression of film in Scotland. Inevitably, there are gaps.' (p.10)

It may give an 'impression' of film in Scotland, but the eighteen essays which make up the book are of varying quality; although 'gaps' are acknowledged and a rough guide is provided to the general subject areas; this is not substantial or convincing enough to make sense of the book's sometimes incoherent structure. Jumping quite unashamedly from genuine historical analysis to homey nostalgia, in the 'mainly historical' section (p.11) and from original insights into the work of film makers to inane hero worship in the section covering 'individual filmmakers and their

films' (p.11), the overall 'impression' one gets is that this official book (published by the S.F.C and the B.F.I with a typically flattering forward by Richard Attenborough), is very much the film industry's view of itself and the viewer of this 'mosaic' gets a free pair of rose tinted spectacles.

Having said this, the essays begin well with *Representing Scotland* by **John Caughie**, lecturer in Theatre, Film and Television at Glasgow University. Acknowledging the improvement in visibility during the 80's of Scottish filmmakers and production, he laments the promise of the 80's that Scotland could expect in the near future a film industry with its own national and international audience. He optimistically notes that although in the '90's this is not the case, *'since much of this visibility has been on television the question of a Scottish cinema still remains' (p.13)*. film making in Scotland is at work and expanding. From this starting block he sets out on a trail of hypothesis on the question of representing Scotland, beginning with a critical re-appraisal of the **Scotch Reels** event and booklet (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1982). Taking into account the formalistic and anti-historical approach of the event, he maintains that the regressive representations in cinema i.e. 'Tartanry', 'Kailyard Mythology' and 'Clydesidism' identified in *Scotch Reels* and the discourse which took place around them remain a useful basepoint in any analysis of a progressive future for Scottish cinema, concluding that:

'The excitement of 'Scotch Reels' was partly to do with engaging with the local and the immediate, partly to do with film theory 'coming out' as Scottish, and partly, at the simplest level to do with hearing Scottish accents debating the national culture in a Festival event which over the years had become a summer colony for London theory. Something of that excitement carried into the wider context of media culture, and put the representation of Scotland firmly and quite positively onto the educational and critical agenda.' (p.21)

Caughie then goes on to examine the difficulties Scottish film makers have had in relating to the 'national' infrastructure set up by Channel 4 and the stifling expectations put on film makers as to what 'Scottish film can be about', with the core of production funding based in the South and relying on a:

'... calculation of which images are most readily marketable. Scotland is still more readily imagined and the imaginings are more easily sold, along the predictable lines of the scenery, the small community, and the post-industrial male angst.' (p.25)

Representing Scotland presents an interesting and constructive set of ideas culminating in the view that a forum should be set up to initiate more genuine communication between the various elements involved in film making and related theory which has difficulty in developing at the moment:

BOOK



...the overwhelming tendency is to section each area of activity into separate compartments from which each pursues its own interests blissfully unaware of what is happening in the other.' (p25)

Notably the above not only reflects the film industry but as the book progresses the essays themselves tend to qualify that critique.

The next group of essays are described as 'mainly historical' beginning with **David Hutchison's** essay *Flickering Light* - an honest account of the **Scottish Film Archive**. Much of the work discussed deals with Scotland observed from abroad, while indigenous work traced is in the main amateur or promotional until Norman McLaren, who - like many Scots - went abroad to enable him to continue his work. Hutchison concludes 'realistically' that while most of the Scottish work discussed 'holds all kinds of interest, it does not represent the beginning of a Scottish Cinematic tradition'.

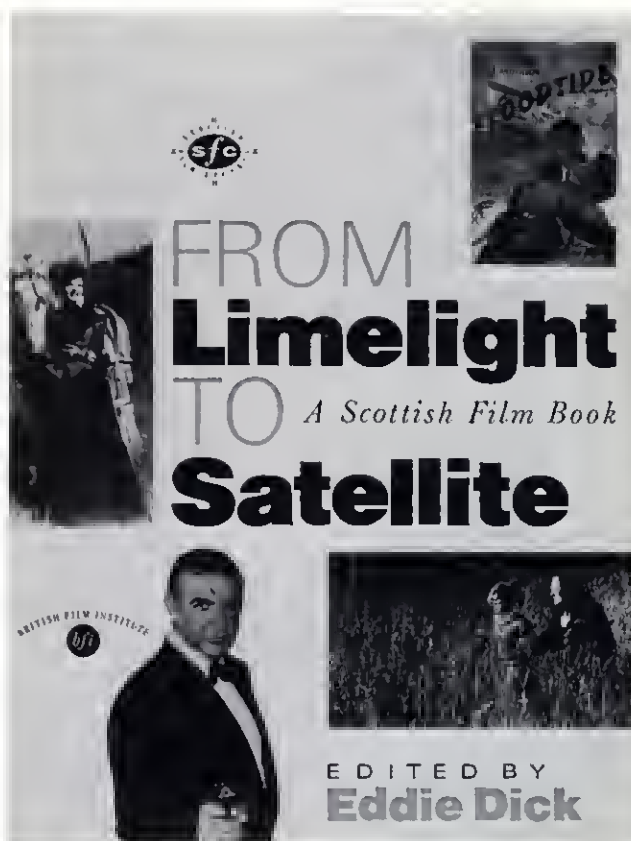
Subsequent essays cover the 30's, a boom period for cinema exhibition, documentary film from 1937-82, and a historical overview of the difficulties facing Scotland in its attempts at setting up a film industry. As the main historical input of the book this section does provide an informative historical background to Scotland's general lack of achievement in cinema, with interesting insights into the particular character of what little film industry there was (and still is) in Scotland. There are lapses, however, into a less historical more 'those were the days' style nostalgic approach, for example **Andrew Young's** *Family Pictures* which looks drearily at the **Singleton and Poole** 'picture house families' of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Also the format of the book, particularly in this section, spawns irritating repetition as similar points and events are brought up again and again.

Following a fairly standard piece on the trials and tribulations of the *Edinburgh International Film Festival* by **Colin McArthur** (sitting precariously on its own as far as coherent overall structure is concerned), are a series of essays on individual film makers and their films. The success of three of these lie in their originality of approach, as with **Murray Grigor's** piece on the director **Sandy Mackendrick**, focussing on the making of his first feature *Whisky Galore*. Also interesting is **Christopher Rush's** account of the making of *Venus Peter*, from his initial meetings with producer **Chris Young**, to his insightful account of his attempts at creating a treatment for the film from his book *A Twelvemonth and a Day*, and the resulting 'outsider' account of watching director and screen writer **Ian Sellar** going through the process of making a film. **Andrew Noble** gives a full and sympathetic account of Bill Douglas' *Trilogy*, describing the piece as 'a work of imaginative truth'. This works well with John Caughie's earlier essay, clearly defining the simplicity of the *Scotch Reels* argument echoing Caughie's admission that it:

'suffered from a desire for clear discernible categories, which led to the omission of clearly valid - though complex - work, such as Douglas' *Trilogy*.

The remaining essays in this group deal with the well exposed work of **Bill Forsyth** and **Sean Connery**. Where **Alan Hunter** manages to come up with an interview with Forsyth which gives a full account of his work and some insight into how Forsyth sees his future in film, **John Millar's** essay on Sean Connery is bizarre in its sycophancy. Beginning with '*Sean Connery is Scotland's only movie superstar*', this eight page piece deals with well known information much covered elsewhere, the only difference being a particularly fawning approach. If the essay is to be believed then one would assume that '*Big Tam as he is still known to Edinburgh folk*' may be Scotland's only actor and as such does a disservice to the acting profession.

The remaining essays cover 'considerations of the film industry' (p12). Most informative of these are **Ian Lockerbie's** essay which charts the ways in which the Scottish Film Production Fund attempts to spread a budget, which probably amounts to Arnold Schwarzenegger's wardrobe costs in *Terminator II*, over a range of deserving projects. Also interesting is **Gus MacDonald's** piece on Scottish Television. He paints a fairly bleak picture of Scottish independent film makings' contribution to network T.V. where - according to '*lethally low ratings*' (p198), for work such as **John McGrath's** *Border Warfare* 'even the Scots did not watch'.



Although MacDonald does see some hopeful signs in 'the emergence of a range of young talents' (p205), he concludes with a warning:

'In the 1990's let us see if we can find the resources and originality to tell ourselves some lively stories, stir some controversy and perhaps expose some home truths. If we don't work together no after three decades of ineffectual division then television in Scotland will atrophy into a parochial, impoverished, service. If there is no strong base for television there will be no strong base for Scottish feature film either'.

The final essay is an interesting attempt to view Scotland from a European film making perspective. **Philip Schlesinger's** *Scotland, Europe and Identity* covers similar ground to Caughie's essay in looking at the 'external influences on national identity', however he approaches the question from a wider European context. Taking as a 'convenient' starting point **Timothy Neat's** film *Play Me Something* he discusses the films' almost unique ability to be both European and Scottish, arguing that:

'The only hopeful European future is one in which we can use our actual plural identities as resources, acknowledge that we be allowed to move freely between them . . . National identities and patriotic self-identification have an important place in such a view, as points of departure. But it also follows that, at the same time, they are but stages in a wider

cultural journey that looks ahead and not behind.' (p232)

Finally, although the book has serious lapses into repetition and lacks coherent structure, at times it constitutes a valuable reference book (the comprehensive filmography and essays on funding and early film history), although an index would have helped. As well as this there are some informative and constructive texts detailing the problems of inadequate funding, the audiences available for Scottish film and regressive representations of Scotland where:

'representation raises questions not just of national identities, but also structural questions of participation, access and training.' (Caughie, p14)

Such a question underpins a practically non-existent Scottish Film Industry. However, most of these issues are raised only in a few of the 18 essays, and in the main by relative outsiders to the 'core' industry i.e. theoreticians such as John Caughie and Philip Schlesinger and the 'televised' view of Gus MacDonald. Overall the book lacks any real critical overview and remains something of an insiders address to one another.

Alex Dempster

CULTURE, TECHNOLOGY & CREATIVITY IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Edited by Philip Hayward, John Libbey, ISBN 0- 86196-266-4.

As we enter the final stages of the twentieth century, it appears that the successful capitalist economies are increasingly being shaped and influenced by the pervasive trio of Culture, Technology and Creativity. Each of these factors has its own individual strengths, but when one is coupled with another the synergy generated has a power and significance not fully realised in its isolation. In this way creativity reflects culture, culture determines levels of technology, technology develops through creative thought, and so on. Or so it seems.

Allied to the capitalist economies' ever increasing demands for Information, the elements of Culture, Technology and Creativity have emerged as the

instigators of new forms of power, wealth, and experience. For example, in the opening chapter to his recent book 'Power Shift', the American writer and social thinker Alvin Toffler points to the fact that:

A revolutionary new system of creating wealth cannot spread without triggering personal, political and international conflict. Change the way wealth is made and you immediately collide with all the entrenched interests whose power arose from the prior wealth-system. Bitter conflicts erupt as each side fights for control of the future.

It is evident even now that established structures, traditions and relationships are being overhauled in the wake of these developments. This situation of on-going, rapid and profit-oriented change inevitably has a less positive side. The benevolent belief that a utopia can be created through supplying goods and services of ever increasing sophistication and novelty to the public is a fallacy of Western capitalist thought. The moral standing of such an acquisition-based society can only be maintained through its ability to provide enough of everything for everybody. This is in essence among the central contradictions of modern economics and provides a basis for the fatalistic view of the future held by anyone not a part of the 'enterprise culture', currently being exported to Eastern Europe while creating recessions in the West.



Recognising this, different cultures have developed many colourful phrases, theories and philosophies to accommodate these eventualities: hiccups, spanners in the works, gremlins, Murphy's Law, entropy, Chaos Theory, the Uncertainty Principle. The significant notion that all these cultural, technological and creative advancements might result in a uniquely egalitarian meritocracy has little hope of being realised so long as institutional power is the driving force making the decisions and forcing the change. From the perspective of such organisations it is always necessary to maintain certain specialisms and idiosyncratic sectors and limit access to certain levels of technology, power and wealth. This inevitably leads to inequality and injustice, prejudice and incompetence, and ultimately the creation of alienated sectors within a society.

The book *Culture Technology and Creativity in the late Twentieth Century* is edited by **Philip Hayward**, currently a lecturer in Media and Theatre Studies at Macquarie University, Sydney and in it twelve writers from various backgrounds take a look at:

'contemporary culture and creativity and their relation to technology . . . The anthology attempts to develop a series of critical perspectives on the relation of cultural practice to technology across a range of media'

(Philip Hayward: *ibid.*)

The range of media addressed in the articles are situated principally at the fringes of the mainstream of artistic practice, namely artists who have successfully managed to gain leading edge resources to make their work. In this sense the critical fringes themselves are not directly addressed, by these I mean practices that could be considered guerrilla art activities and interventionist artforms like computer viruses, graffiti and postal art. These approaches are equally valid and often use various levels of technology and hybrid systems to achieve their ends, however their efforts are left off the agenda.

Having read through the articles, a consequence of looking at a grouping of the size, breadth and nature as outlined in the book, there is a sense that any analysis of the art produced is compromised by concentrating principally on the means of its creation. The exceptions to this however are the articles by **Jez Welsh**, who goes into some detail in analysing five video works, and **Philip Brophy** who concentrates on analysing the use of music and sound in Dennis Hopper's film 'Colors'. The question of whether or not the particular technology employed results in anything 'worthwhile' is not addressed by the majority of the writers, it is more a case of appreciation in the *modus operandi* of it all.

From my position as a practitioner both commercially and creatively, it is realistic to say that in the commercial environment, invention is the mother of necessity. Technological development, especially in

video post-production, is a non-stop drive towards novelty. Editing houses demand 'more difference' because their customers demand 'more difference'. How can Toilet Duck outsell Domestos if the punter cannot remember the advert? In this environment, creative technological innovation is an instantly dated and expendable consequence of finance, fashion and the fear of failure.

Within the realms of un(der)funded artists' video however, necessity is the mother of invention, because invention is the only unique resource the artist possesses to manipulate, without incurring unrealistic costs and compromise. The forced necessity to create within limited technical constraints means that new applications and inventions of theme, form and technique have to be evolved to meet the requirements of the individual work. This need not always be the case, but it often is. There is an irony in this however, where the notional system of a technological 'trickle-down' has been reversed. The results of artists' experiments have filtered through to the commercial image makers who struggle with their highly sophisticated technology to imitate and re-vitalise their practice through the adoption and adaptation of these intrinsically low-tech ways, means and forms.

George Barber, an early Scratch video artist and maker of *Taxi Driver II* and *The Venetian Ghost* for Channel 4 Television, in his article *Scratch and After* talks with undisguised glee at the number of edits he could achieve with the then new Sony Series 5 edit suite.

' . . . with the edit button, located top right, bang out shots as you go, (with the right hand), pressing END when you've had enough (with the left hand). There's no stopping involved. It is possible to perform, depending on how fast you want to go, forty or more edits in one minute like this . . . This facility more than any other shaped a lot of the (Scratch) work, especially mine.'

(George Barber: *ibid.*)

But such a statement suggests that a genre based solely upon the ability to create a free association of imagery can only have a limited lifespan as the novelty soon wears out for both maker and viewer.

One overbearing credo that appears to filter through all the articles in the book, is the belief that technique alone can be creativity. Creative examples to support many of the arguments within the articles are centred, in many cases, on samples drawn either from popular culture or an esoteric selection of artists' work. With **Marga Bijvoet's** article, the analysis is principally of the US based Art and Technology Movement and Experiments in Art and Technology of the sixties and early seventies. **Andy Darley** centres his arguments on the American Whitney brothers, NASA, Hollywood and IBM, **Rebecca Coyle's** discussion of holography is about a medium esoteric enough to belong to a different planet in the reader's ability to experience

it, Brophy (the film 'Colors'), Barber (Scratch and recent pop video and technological developments), Hayward (developments in pop videos style, form and content) and Welsh (contemporary visual technology and training) all address certain popular and accessible areas and name examples. The flaw here is that without the knowledge of these individual works the arguments fall into abstract hypothesis. The currency of ideas exchanged around the creative use of technology is therefore by definition a thing of paradoxical value. If all we see are the results of commercial applications of new media technology and not the frontier struggles of artists working equally validly within the medium, what intellectual need is being met and what frontier challenged when the essential exposure of artist to audience cannot be achieved, openly debated and appreciated?

A few of the most recognised UK artists to successfully employ state of the art television technology include Cerith Wyn Evans ('Degrees of Blindness' features many advanced television keying techniques), Terry Flaxton ('The Inevitability of Colour' features complex computer animation of text and was edited using digital technology), George Snow ('Weiland' includes sophisticated studio shooting and multi-layering techniques) and Derek Jarman ('The Last of England' and 'The Garden' were shot principally on film, transferred to videotape for editing and optical effects and then copied back to film). Flaxton's work is derived from a mythical narrative, Snow has adapted an existing piece of writing, and Jarman's particularly personal imagery and style has largely been preceded by other artists and pop video directors.

It is this sense of Image that has a double-edged role, particularly in contemporary time-based prac-

tice. There is the image on the screen and the Image of the Maker. The two are unfortunately inextricably linked. Success is becoming determined by access to resources, 'I'll only edit digitally', 'Can't make it without a So-and-So', 'Will not make anything unless it's for broadcast'. This attitude has been generated and exploited by the funding policies of the BFI, Channel Four and the Arts Council of Greater London and through the selections made for compilation programmes like 'Ghosts in the Machine', 'Dazzling Image', '11th Hour' 'White Noise'. Money from these funding sources leads to more money from these sources, and in this way a false sense of 'creative access' to top end facilities is built up. However the situation arises that because of this apparent benevolence to some, there again inevitably exists an alienated fringe who see their new visions and new thought ignored. Instead we are faced with a display of new techniques to describe old themes, myths, stories, legends, etc. The energy is being directed more towards illustration and the interpretation of other artists' works whether they be by Brecht, Wilde, Plato, or whomever, and not outward towards the contemporary reality hammering on the front door.

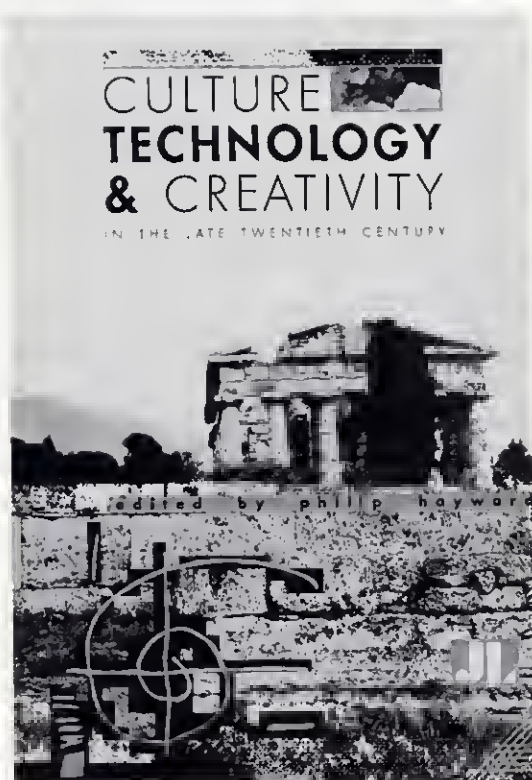
Returning to the more general issue of technology and creative practice, **Paul Brown**, creative director of the Advanced Computer Graphics Centre at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, in his article *Metamedia and Cyberspace*, comes closest to reflecting the views of many makers and not the academic commentators. In talking about the currently available graphics systems for example, he draws a parallel with the practice of oil painting, stating:

'Despite their limitations these graphic arts systems have proved of value: they are non-toxic or significantly less toxic than traditional media; they can significantly enhance productivity and, despite the often strong signature of the particular system in use, they have proved the viability of this new meta-media to handle a diversity of styles and methods ...'

Paul Brown

Artists themselves work in these realms regardless of the meaning of the medium. The concept of art practice within a meta-media - which I interpret as meaning realising the creative idea regardless of and beyond the normal and conventional applications and expectations of the individual medium - is only possible through tackling, exploring and exploiting these forms and technologies. Brown goes on to say that this has consequences for the art mainstream because such technologically led art

... is not concerned with the production of artefact. By contrast it is exactly the inverse of those attributes the mainstream miss that defines this area's uniqueness and potential. Computer art is based upon an information- transaction meta-medium and, like Dada and many of the works of the Art Language



and other conceptual groups, is essentially, an ephemeral and virtual artform concerned with communication and interaction.'

(Paul Brown: *ibid.*)

The articles in this book are described as intending to 'illuminate a rapidly developing area of culture' (Hayward), unfortunately what actually comes across is a series of tracts concerned with new media anthropology. A catalogue of techniques, approaches, aspects, conditions and characteristics. As any practitioner based outside of the centrally funded zones of culture will no doubt understand, whether from Wyoming, Wester Ross or Wellinborough, there is inevitably nothing *rapidly developing* about it there.

There is also an undercurrent of fear in some of the observations. Despite the wide scale use by most writers of quotations from philosophers including Lyotard, Baudrillard, Barthes, Althusser, Debord, the feeling still exists that this meta-media practice is travelling very fast and that there is no stylistic or formalistic structure or trend being established (Barber speaks of two threads to eighties video being 'New Romantic' and 'Scratch'; but outside the London club/clique scene he also describes, the relevance of this observation is parochially suspect). Because of this the writers define, or identify anything other than the fact of the existence of forward moving meta-media and related practices. Therefore their role is marginalised, their position just observational, their contributions stripped of value outside of certain academic circles.

In an interview on BBC2 last year while editing his feature film 'The Sheltering Sky' on optical video disc, the Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci suggested that every artist has to face the electronic destiny of images. This phenomenon, rather than being a terrible thing, actually was more rewarding for the artist in that the exposure of the work was bound to increase as was its lifetime. In her article *Digitisation and the Living Death of Photography* Anne-Marie Willis, a lecturer in Art and Photographic History at the University of New South Wales College of Fine Art, expresses her fears about the 'techno-immaterial' nature of modern image production and manipulation. She states that once within an 'image synthesiser . . . photography loses its special aesthetic status and becomes no more than visual information'. The fears identified in this absurd observation - as if any image can on face value be anything more than visual information - lead later to phrases like cannibalisation and technological mutations. She finishes by stating that future developments in these technologies need to be continuously monitored.

Creativity and technology have always been closely associated, from Futurism to Dada, from Pop Art to the present day. The two are intimately connected bi-products of human endeavour, whether produced

in a scientific laboratory or an artist's studio. What this book hoped to achieve was some ground rules and lines of perspective to help interpret the direction these forms are heading. However it is evident the routes taken by this cyber-graffiti (Paul Brown) are as diverse as the practitioners themselves and they are not concerned with intellectual definitions and analysis. As Paul Brown points out:

'... the potential for the creative arts is promising. We may, at last, have broken the stranglehold of the gilded frame and bypassed the parasitic high-priests and culture vultures to establish an egalitarian art of, for, and by the people.'

(Paul Brown: *ibid.*)

Video Still, Peter Callas



The combination of Culture, Technology and Creativity in the late twentieth century as seen in these articles is a nebulous concept. The values driving it, and the applications of it, seem in many ways to be the antipathy of the vibrant future shock art medium that it so obviously can be. The sense that only the commercial field can exploit the talent and justify the resources, in order to gain the exposure, is a sad state of affairs at a time when mainstream television programming is so tired and conventional looking, and the advertising world is re-running material from the previous decade. The future outside the perspective of these articles, I feel however, looks very different. With the increasing sophistication of domestic equipment, Video Bmm, disc based stills photography, PC based graphics, animation and editing systems for the kitchen table, the future of new imagery is emphatically electronic. But the creativity still rests with the maker. In this sense the means of reproduction is within the grasp of almost anyone with a mind and an eye. The value of the arguments in this compilation will fade as the basis for their existence is surpassed by the possibilities of the media themselves.

ALAN ROBERTSON



R e v i e w

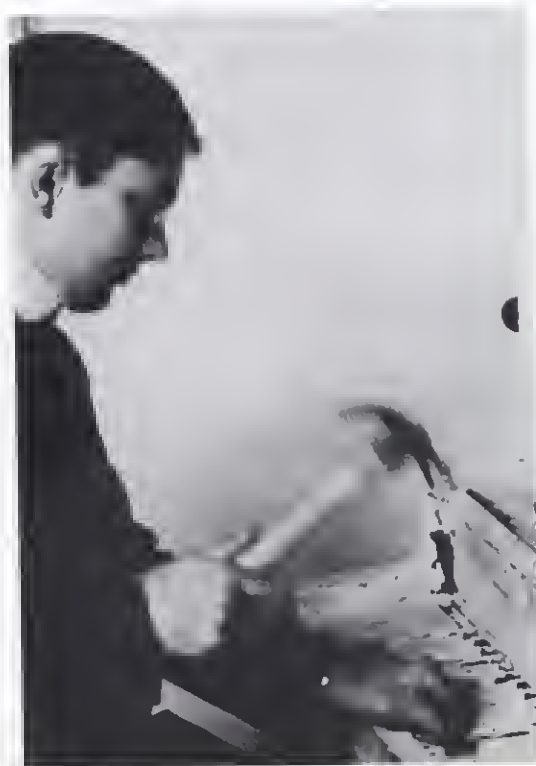
HISTORY LESSON

One of the great weights around the neck of popular music, making it sluggish and retarding its development, is the monolithic nature of its received history. Recent advertising for the numinously naff 'Purple Rainbow' compilation, a 'definitive' aural history of rock (read a celebration of metal and related bastards of urban blues), merely underlines the generalised poverty of thought characteristic of contemporary music criticism. Dissident histories, alternative views of the music's development, are few and far between. When they do appear, they are often treated as the exotic outpourings of eccentrics. At the same time, and apparently contradictorily, the conservative elements of the music press cling to an outmoded self-image of wild, cynical, smart-arsed wackiness, spicing up their tired rags with increasingly outlandish claims. For example, in the past few months the einseitig German synthi-pop band Kraftwerk has been hailed left, right and centre as the most influential group of all time. Little evidence has been offered for this curious claim; nor has any commentary appeared in print on whether the band's influence - only tenuously separable from that of the machines they use - has been good or bad. But this is no surprise. Such brazen drivel is par for the course. All is conducted in a limbo of market forces, where music has no past and no future, no depth; merely a half-life, momentarily stabilised and brought into being by the attention of parasitic hacks.

So much in this scenario is lost. The influence on much recent popular music of Fluxus, for instance, is rarely discussed, usually being confined to vague references to The Velvet Underground and, often jeeringly, Yoko Ono. In fairness, this generalised ignorance is due in part perhaps to the unavailability of much Fluxus material, in part to the fugitive quality of many of the Fluxus performances, and in part also

to the separation of different types of music into the increasingly untenable categories (regardless of quality but mindful of value) of 'high art' and 'low art'. Fluxus operated in the realm of the serious and was to some extent a series of laboured jokes, one-off forays down the road of excess linked by a philosophy that combined minimalism, theatricality and an iconoclastic redefinition of what constituted a cultural event. Chewing a carrot, "feeding" a piano some hay, breaking instruments or releasing insects inside a concert hall - such works are the stuff of legend. The word "silly" comes to mind more often than not, but in musical terms Fluxus was influential despite its concerted attempts at a radical dislocation of the aural event.

"Tellus 24: FluxTellus" is a cassette magazine release of music and non-music by members of the Fluxus movement, edited by **Barbara Moore**. Chiefly of historical interest, it inevitably fails to provide much in the way of an indication of the theatrical nature of the performances. Fluxus was little concerned with the medium of tape; its members confronted the crisis of notation by writing increasingly subjective scores - and to be frank, "FluxTellus" is not that listenable: most of it is undeniably tedious and some is numbingly dull. An exception, and the high point of the collection, is the ten minute extract from La Monte Young's "Poem for Chairs, Tables, Benches, etc", an exhilarating barrage of furniture-generated noise. I've been listening to quite a bit of junk-mail recently and, at the risk of accusations of being a killjoy, it strikes me that this recording ought to be among the required listening for anyone involved in the so-called "cassette culture" network. First, it's a sobering indication that much of the ground has been covered before, more coherently and incisively; secondly, it provides an object lesson in the perils of self-



AUDIO



indulgence. Those suspicious of the very term 'music' and especially those who view culture in terms of rival conspiracy theories of bad taste will want to hear this collection at least once.

Fluxus provides a good source of material for those whose job it is to represent the recent past as having been peopled by wild and weird characters; mainly, one suspects, this notion is being promoted by those who were on the sidelines at the time - the wild and weird types are either dead or in no fit state to argue. The mealy-mouthed philosophy which underwrites the contemporary self-induced nostalgic delusion is still that which Phil Ochs lampooned twenty-odd years ago: "If everyone was groovy, we could all have a real good time". Ochs, whose politics meant he would always be an awkward customer, was more often than not a thorn in the flesh of the groovy purveyors of cool - including on occasion his own complacent fans: his "Gunfight at Carnegie Hall" album must be one of a very few records in which the audience's boos are a prominent feature of the show. Ochs's politicised music could only intermittently and accidentally be the object of fashion, and his work has largely faded from view, to our collective loss.

Some years ago an LP of early demo tapes by Ochs was released, the liner notes of which were by Sean Penn; these threatened a movie - Sean was to play Phil, I guess; the rest of the cast I'll leave to your imagination. Mercifully, the project has not so far been realised. History has not always been so kind to Ochs, whose career was severely curtailed by his being banned from radio and tv (and many countries), and who was extensively harassed by the FBI and CIA. Unexpectedly, in the place of the movie, comes a new release of "Phil Ochs There & Now: Live in Vancouver, 1968" (Rhino) - fourteen songs from one of the first gigs that the Yippie vice-presidential candidate Ochs played after that year's Chicago Convention. While many of his contemporaries serenaded senators and sank in self-delusion, Ochs remained self-critical and demanding. His work remains vital for many reasons, musical and political. He was one of the few artists to analyse America's infatuation with self-destruction and the glamorous death of its idols; and this recording is, to some extent, a reflection on the glamorous death of America itself. Ochs describes his work as 'racing from the mystical to the revolutionary'. This collection presents many of his most provocative songs, performed simply on acoustic guitar, with the added bonus (?) on one track of Allen Ginsberg guesting on finger cymbals. Yeah.

Introducing one song, Ochs remarks (with reference to John Wayne) that "one of the dilemmas that America presents is that some of America's truly great artists are very right-wing and reactionary and not particularly intelligent - but they're still great." This is a first-rate recording of one of the few really great left-wing, radical and intelligent singers of the last

fifty years. I wept. Meanwhile the civilised world queues up to rediscover the vapid posturing of The Doors via Hollywood's latest biopic. So it goes.

Though apparently musically dissimilar, Henry Cow, whose first three albums have just been rereleased (on ESD via ReR), provides a logical extension of Ochs's confrontational practice. Initially, on "Legend" (1973), they worked audibly in the tradition of the early Soft Machine, playing intricate "progressive rock": John Peel gets a mention on the sleeve notes, a guest musician plays "pixiphone". More than a period piece, "Legend" nevertheless rather pales in comparison to "Unrest" (1974). Forced by contractual obligations to produce an album, and only having enough scored material for one side, Henry Cow (following the example of Faust) improvised to tape



and used this raw material to construct exploded collective compositions. The outstanding "Deluge", a melancholic struggle between drifting reeds/horns and guitar/bass which terminates in a strangely moving boozy late-night song, provides an object lesson in what could be achieved by this method - and by this method alone. The equivalent tracks on "In Praise of Learning" (1975), recorded by a merged Henry Cow/Slapp Happy, are more complex and concentrated - taking on board AMM-type noise and industrial sounds - but perhaps less immediate; and it is the songs, with their strident political lyrics delivered by Dagmar Krause, which stand out and which contextualise the noisy instrumentals. Whereas LaMonte Young merely wanted to re-arrange the furniture, Henry Cow was more ambitious and, like Ochs, wished to articulate in its music the possibility of profound social change. It is a measure of the judicious nature of the group's aesthetic decisions and of the generalised political failures of our times that these recordings are still potent today

Review

Video Not Sculpture

Video Positive 1991, Liverpool, May 1991.

The second *Video Positive* staged by Merseyside Moviola at the Bluecoat Gallery and the Tate in Liverpool in April, was a much more assured show than the first in 1989. A dozen installations by artists from Britain, Europe, North America and Australia gave an engaging insight into many of the genres and concerns being developed by artists in this area at the start of the nineties. It was not a thematic show, the selection being largely pragmatic rather than proscriptive.

The technical problems involved in staging so many installations were all but invisible, for which credit should be given to the organisers and technical crew, especially when so many galleries make an issue of this, and consistently get it wrong. The split site nature of the show, between the two main venues, while posing no real problem in distance, did however, leave many visitors to the city (especially from overseas) wondering why there was no centre to the festival side of the show. A gathering place for chatting and meeting fellow visitors was sorely missed. This is only a minor criticism, as most visitors during the month long show were probably Liverpool residents, but on the special weekends when screenings were staged in the evenings, there was nowhere one could rendezvous easily. I can't think of a similar European event that doesn't get this right.

The contrast between these two venues was also fascinating: the cool gloss and formality of the museum, and the cosy familiarity of a city arts centre. The Tate did at least acknowledge the presence of the show this time around, although its Director thought, once again, that this was a good time for his annual leave. For me the problem of video as sculpture reared its head again with some artists

succumbing to the temptation of stepping over the boundary of necessary construction in order to stage the work and contextualise it, to mainly third rate sculpture. With the exception of one work, no one went too far in this respect, but it was a close run thing.

Starting with the works at **The Tate**, I was impressed by the amount of thought that had been given to the layout of the works in the two large galleries set aside for the six installations. Although sound did spill over from one piece to another, it was minimal and not disruptive or confusing.

The German artist, **Maria Vedder** produced one of the highlights of the show. *Sparkle and Fire* was a five channel installation displayed on five floor level monitors forming an arc, projecting outwards to the viewer, in a large corner of the space. Behind the monitors, slide projectors described planes and lines with light slicing through the dimness. On the screens a continuous movement was created from right to left by the incredibly precise choreography undertaken during the shooting of the work. Every frame was always slowly becoming something else as its contents moved across the screen. A collage of feathers and smoke drifted, as the camera tracked, and became a jet of dust moving sideways across first one monitor and then its neighbour and then its neighbour and so-on. When you looked back to the first monitors the process was repeated with another collection of objects or shimmering presences. Truly stunning and apparently seamless, the work was hypnotic, a real tour de force by one of Europe's premier video artists. The ambient soundtrack, by **Brian Eno** echoed the visual properties of the work, but was a little safe and unchallenging.

This was just the opposite with **Lei Cox's** *Magnification Maximus*. The quadrophonic sound track was as challenging as you can get, and was probably one of the pieces that did suffer a little from its location in the Tate as the volume level was too low. A kaleidoscope of images of animals combined with a cacophony of sound to produce his most complex work so far. Although the mania evident in the piece was intentional, it suffered from being too busy at times: a metaphorical database, spewing forth information, images and sounds, its effect was urgent and overwhelming. Lei Cox confirms his position as one of the few artists in Britain prepared to take on new digital media wholeheartedly with a vigour and freshness that is used to re-examine the human condition.

Another artist not afraid of using technologies is **Simon Biggs**. *Alchemy* is his most accomplished piece so far, a digitally illuminated 'book of hours' produced on and controlled interactively by a computer. It was displayed on two large video monitors turned on their sides and arranged like an open book, each screen becoming a page. The playback system was laser disc with interactive

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software, allowing the 'reader' to turn the pages back and forth with a wave of the hand over a photo electric switch placed in front of the display. Above the display, and forming a corridor in space was a row of dim incandescent bulbs. The raised wooden floor was rigged to amplify ones footsteps on approaching the dias producing an ethereal church like quality which enhanced and focussed the reading of the work. The pages themselves were bewitching and intricate illuminations, the creatures and figures would sometimes move across the page, unlike any real book, and the whole piece was an absorbing electronic delight. This is a work which I would like to see installed in a more imaginative setting (other than the neutral museum space) to really bring out its qualities. The work is no end-of-the-pier sideshow: it is a demanding and innovative piece using new technology, not for its own sake, but because its maker has something to say, and this is the best way to say it.

Brada Behan and **Hvorje Horvatic's** *Geography* was another visually stunning work. Large screen back projection monitors were revealed through ragged holes cut into three vertical banners hanging from ceiling to floor. In front on the floor, a large earthwork had been constructed which was not altogether necessary, the resonances of this work were spellbinding as it flowed from one image to another creating relationships without narrative base or causality, but upon the insight and feel of the artists moving from earth to water, fire and air.

The other works at the Tate: **Daniel Dion's** *Anicca* and **Madelon Hooykaas** and **Elsa Stansfield's** *Intermittant Signals* were less impressive. The former work was confused and ambiguous with a 'tacked on' interactive element which was meaningless. Most people watched the time lapsed clouds on one screen, which were at least pretty. *Intermittant Signals* didn't seem to know whether it should be a video installation at all, preferring to dabble in the European groove of 'if we pretend it is sculpture, maybe someone will think it is acceptable as art'.

In this case it tried to be photography as well, with flat screen LCD displays embedded in photographic frames.

Moving to the **Bluecote**, **Judith Goddard's** *Garden of Earthly Delights* stole most people's attention. A three monitor piece which is a development from her previous *Luminous Portrait* made for the Late Show last year. The work explored a super real electronic world of earthly delights in which all the techniques of electronic matting and animation, that Quantel's Harry machine is superlative at producing, were controlled with consummate and unfolding skill by Goddard's unnerving direction and artistry. A young woman is continually transformed into the bride's uniform and then the cycle reverses back again. Meanwhile, in the garden around her, and in the distance, landscape is disforming into ruin. An energetic piece of animation which I would like to see as a single channel work, I'm not sure it was an installation, more a three channel work or triptych.

Catharina Elwas' Wishing Well was a piece of pure whimsy and some controversy. As one needed to be five feet tall to look into the 'well', it excluded some of its obvious visitors: children. This didn't seem to stop the more resourceful, however. The 'reflection' which was the TV screen at the bottom of a constructed well was a child's face, and for me it was child as self rather than other. The piece stayed the right side of the video/sculpture debate as the construction was a necessary part of the illusion rather than for its own sake.

The Fujiyama Pyramid Project by **Peter Callas** was an ambitious development of the same artist's now famous *Neo Geo*. As such it lacked the simplicity and purity of the original tape, and for me fell foul of the video/sculpture principle. Elaborate structures of a pyramid and Mount Fuji relating to the graphics on the currencies of the USA and Japan were proper developments of a theme, but not necessarily as constructions or pieces of sculpture.

Steve Partridge



NEW HOPES FOR A SCOTTISH CINEMA

Glasgow Film and Video Workshop,
Production Workshop Films and
Videos, 1991.

On June 5th and 6th 1991, audiences at **Glasgow Film Theatre** had the opportunity to see a good example of some of the short films and videos currently being made in Scotland. Funded largely by **Glasgow District Council Festivals Unit** (although the **Scottish Film Council** also made a contribution, and a few filmmakers raised additional finance where necessary), and produced through the **Glasgow Film and Video Workshop**, the 14 projects had been chosen from around 50 scripts originally submitted. The criterion for selection was a combination of "visual strength, achievability and script quality", according to **Peta Gregson**, workshop coordinator. Only one documentary was chosen, simply because the overwhelming majority of submissions were for fiction. And while it would be foolish to deny that much of the material was flawed, there was enough quality on the screen to encourage feelings of optimism for the future.

As is normal in such an event, one feels the temptation to look for a theme running through the programme, but this would be short-sighted and self-defeating. However, the attractive, cinematic qualities in late 1940's Film Noir manifest themselves in several of the pieces, notably *What She Saw*, *The Scripture Killer*, and *The Voyeurs*. What is interesting is the way in which the directors of these three films took on board those facets of the Noir genre which they felt to be most relevant: **Peline Lew** and **Robert Meek** concentrated on the introspection and isolation which Noir protagonists experience; **Owen Thomas** took great care over the lighting and composition of each shot in *The Scripture Killer*, creating powerful images which still resonate; and **Ewen Morrison** seamlessly blended the suffocation of angst-ridden characters with an imaginative display of images in *The Voyeurs*.

What She Saw, the story of a young woman's decline to the edge of madness due to an over-identification with insecure heroines, is a highly entertaining 13 minute film edited with slide rule precision. Initially shot silent on Super-8mm, then transferred, edited and sound-dubbed on U-Matic video, *What She Saw* includes extracts from the Hollywood movies which have brought about the imbalance in the young woman. It gives evidence that Lew and Meek have a great deal to offer as a filmmaking team, because they are aware of what is and is not cinematic. But *What She Saw* also operates as a sort of feminist critique, highlighting the inanities of Hollywood's portrayal of maudlin, 'genteel' women as typified in post-war psychodramas. In the blurring of fiction and

reality we are invited to examine our own perhaps perverse enjoyment of such sexually politicised films, the legacy of which is still present today.

The Voyeurs (made on U-Matic) is one of the most beautifully assembled low budget achievements, in my opinion, in recent years. From the opening distortion of the sub-Badalamenti chord, and its underpinning of the various images which move across the screen, we sense immediately that here is a director who knows what makes for 'good cinema'. It is a richly textured 15 minutes, a heightened realism present at every moment, but what makes Ewen Morrison's film all the more impressive is that its ostensible subject is the telephone chatline service, surely a topic more suitable one would think for a radio play than for the big screen. *The Voyeurs* occupies the mid-ground between Hitchcock's *Rear Window* and Kieślowski's *A Short Film About Love*. The actors don't 'act', the feeling is claustrophobic, the atmosphere is tinged with sexual repression. The film's bleakness and foreboding make it the most arresting film in the programme. The camerawork of Michael S McGlinn and Morrison himself is outstanding; the sound and music are used to great effect; and the editing is flawless because it does not allow the narrative to stagnate, a common mistake when talented photographers are tempted to make moving pictures.

Besides the fascination with Film Noir, some of the filmmakers managed to evoke the feeling of early 1960s French court-metragues. The use of black and white in **Lloret Mackenne's** *The Stolen Orange* (shot on 16mm) allows the grey city of Glasgow to resemble the equally grey Paris of the New Wave. It is an accessible film because it sets out to tell a story, and does so with economy and simplicity. Narrative is sustained through well chosen music and impressively fluid camerawork by Lewis Buchan, and the arduous colouration of the orange was appreciated by the audience, an original idea perfectly executed. The film is based on Brian Patten's poem which we hear just before the end credits, a warm and intense poem which is given an appropriately humanist treatment by a gifted filmmaker.

Other features of the programme were the high standard of editing throughout, and an awareness of the poetry inherent in certain everyday moments. **Alan Finlay** and **Stephen Hurrell** show that this poetry can be arrived at by lengthy and considered contemplation of the scene. Finlay's *Reclamation* and Hurrell's *Living Memory* (both made on Super 8 and edited on video, producing a rich grainy texture which lends a dreamlike quality to the image) feature a daring use of sound and music by **Michael R Forsyth**.

The former is a well conceived triptych which has an exciting filmic opening as the camera searches around. Enigmatic subtitling heightens the mystery and gradually these elusive qualities combine with enough identifiable material to permit the viewer access to the woman's self-imposed isolation. Later,

there is a moment of great stillness: in a crowded railway station we see a man, in slow motion, smoothly easing his way past the anonymous figures as he runs to keep an appointment. The moment has a strange, hypnotic quality, and it is to Finlay's credit that we can share it.

In *Living Memory*, a man walks along a beach alone, striding purposefully across the frame; he is dwarfed by the landscape, yet this apparently inconsequential motion is imbued with a doom laden significance. Stephen Hurrell allows his lonely man to feel both vulnerable and yet defiant in the face of awesome surroundings. Later, familiar pieces of household furniture are almost in the manner of a De Chirico painting. This unsettling metaphor reflects the insecurity felt by the solitary young man as he leaves his island home for the mainland.

Wider issues raised by the screenings include a comparison between film and video projection in cinemas, which in this instance, must involve a discussion of the sound quality, the importance of which is often overlooked in low budget filmmaking. The 16mm films had the considerable benefit of a sound mix courtesy of STV and BBC. This removed many of the imperfections; such cosmetics were not possible in the other formats.

Perhaps a more pressing concern is whether this scheme can become an annual event. This is being discussed and things should become clearer in the coming months. Individuals will of course continue

to make short films or videos, but without the co-operation of cinemas like GFT, the danger is that this work may never be seen, and most importantly, no communication of ideas will take place.

The financiers and Glasgow Film Theatre are to be congratulated and further encouraged in their support of young film/video makers in Scotland. Especially encouraging was the way that some of the films were specifically 'cinematic'. This is a slippery term, but one which demands, among other things (for example, an understanding of 'mis-en-scene'), the following qualities: the filmmaker respects the audience and insists they are not spoon-fed; they are asked to come halfway and contribute to the film; an attempt is also made to relate the events and emotions to the settings in which they are experienced, a form of awareness which one could loosely term poetic.

If a film culture is to take root in Scotland, perhaps we should be looking for our influences (as David Hayman and Ian Sellar have done with *Silent Screams* and *Venus Peter*), because it is quite apparent that British - and Scottish - filmmakers have for too long relied on transposing the theatrical tradition to the screen. Let's hope that in Scotland we shall not be guilty of such insularity.

Steve McDaid

(video copies of all the films are available from Glasgow Film and Video Workshop, tel: 041 554 6502)



Pauline Law and Robert Meek, *What She Saw*



Not Necessarily:

New Works for Television
BBC 2, July – September

In the 90's, there is more proximity than polarity between video art and broadcast TV – such programmes as *Dadarama*, *Ghosts in the Machine*, *White Noise*, and others, which, although few and far between, have nevertheless made colourful inroads into the televisual flow and critical inroads into its homogenous output.

Scotland has never been a media orientated visual culture, despite the much known David Hall precedent at Scottish Television in the 70's, inspiring the '19:4:90' series of 'Television Interventions' which occurred in Glasgow in 1990. More recently, BBC Scotland has transmitted a new series of 'video art' pieces under the programme title of **Not Necessarily** and broadcast nationally in the UK on BBC 2. Commissioned by the BBC and in conjunction with DJCA in Dundee (produced by Ken McGregor and Steve Partridge), the programmes were broadcast between July and September 1991.

The eight programmes of 10 minutes duration contained four new 'live action' commissions, and several pieces from ex-students in the post-graduate department at DJCA. The works ranged from the exploratory to the demonstrative, realising some memorable pieces in animation, fiction, semi-documentary and computer graphics – yet more grist to the mill for DJCA as one of the UK's pioneering college facilities. It might be misleading, therefore, to call this video art.

I watched all programmes (except one) on a preview video copy, ironically enough, channel zapping for the hell of it when I was suitably distracted and cutting back into the normal sequencing of broadcast. On this occasion – a Saturday afternoon – the deluge consisted of childrens programmes and adverts, the most noted of which was *Danger Mouse in Gaelic*: surprise is always a pleasure even if born in ignorance of the language.

This was not, then, ideal circumstances for watching **Not Necessarily**, one presumes that the short bites that it is slotted into is all important, the work being considered in this context, in the flow of television. Whilst this might be a justifiable argument, TV is not so unpredictable that you couldn't imagine and know the context already, but the possibilities of time-specific associations is of course denied. Thanks to technology, TV is video and can be seized from the clutches of the broadcast moment.

The ability to appeal or cut across age shone through in several of the pieces: in **Lei Cox's** *Three Unanswered Questions*, in **Doug Aubrey's** *Blood Tied and Colour Blind*, **Stephen Kemp's** *Station Master at the Edge of Time*, and in **Lorne Simpson's** *Nothing But Reflection*. It is less interesting in the computer renderings of mutoid animals and humans that allude to commercial application. There were exceptions to this as far as

computer imagery was concerned: **Merk Urwin's** *EndGame* and *Night at the Joli*, and **Devid Cox's** *Time Piece*.

Blood Tied and Colour Blind by **Doug Aubrey**, one of the four commissions, is a celebration of the Old Firm football teams (Rangers and Celtic) and is a humorous and fast piece which attempts a kind of 'Roy of the Rovers' approach in its structure: the framing and sequencing are constructed and intended to flow like a comic book. The video follows two football supporters from their opposite ends of the city, using the iconography of the urban cityscape and takes them through their respective areas of allegiance; the Celtic supporter through Parkhead and Barrowfield, the Rangers supporter through Govan and Ibrox. The lighthearted appeal of the piece, which could be described as a piece of documentary comedy narrated by a character called Archie Amphetamine played by Scots comic **Bruce Morton** – underlies a more serious intent. As the graffiti on the walls state – 'No More Bigotry' and 'Home Rule' suggests a unification of supposed opposites, an image conjured up again by one of the closing shots of the fans' scarves tied together to form a St. Andrews Cross.

Judith Goddard's commission, *A Bluish Green* presented a postcard piece of Glasgow with all the predictable ingredients; alternative tourist videos that suggest that prior visits and more careful consideration might have resulted in a piece with something more to say. With precise framing and dissolves, the visuals comprise of shopping malls, Kibble Palace, a fossil grove, the Clyde River, the city at night, the Botanic Gardens, all of which suggest a rather arbitrary use of imagery, which is retrieved by the soundtrack which uses read news items concerning infantile morality, Japanese investment in the city, a gunman's suicide, a drugs court case, and domestic stress. This obviously hinted at an undercurrent of violence behind the glossy image perhaps, but the unrelatedness of the imagery and the sound did leave one wondering about a lack of coherence. Only one image in the piece suggested a 'theme' of ecology: oilskinned men in the Botanic Gardens shot in slow motion, which has a slightly unnerving quality about it and is undermined by the closing shot in the piece which further validates the suspicion of the makers distanced viewpoint of the city: an ariel shot of the Botanic Gardens taken from the roof of the BBC Scotland building.

Lei Cox's *Three Unanswered Questions*, and **Kate Meynell's** *As She Opened Her Eyes*, were less successful works in this context. In the former, the fallibility of common-sense beliefs is dealt with in a studio shot piece which left me wondering if I should be looking for some underlying motivation beyond the perfection of the production values. At first frustrating, the best the work aspires to is delightful diletantism, rather than being thought-provoking or – for me – funny. This was disappointing for a strong image-maker like Cox, who also composed the title soundtrack for the series. Where Cox's piece lacked depth, **Kate Meynell's** *As She Opened Her Eyes* was oblique enough to suggest that there was something going on which this male viewer (in this case it

Other works were outstanding: **Stephen Kemp's *Station Master at the Edge of Time***; beautifully shot and edited dealing with the aforementioned locked into the past and living in a present devoid of human interaction. Again, the piece works on many levels –appealing to both adult and the young alike, provoking enough for a video art audience, and accessible enough for a non-specialist public. The same can be applied to **Charles Wilson's *The Kirk The Sea and the Red Fish***, a moving and poetic work set, presumably, in some Highland coastal hamlet. A story of betrayed love which ends in a fishermans death after rejection from a woman, and although sounding a trite cliched, the piece uses the available technology to deal with traditional Celtic themes, the story being based on a story by George Mackay Brown. By using the images to tell the story, with careful dissolves, overlays, and sound, it at

Two short works shone through as epitomising the qualities of continuum and fragmentation of video. **Stephen Kemp's** *The Dead and the Dying* uses a shot of a man sitting at a baywindow. With the passing clouds and the use of dissolves to record slightly different positions of the man in the chair, duration is implied. In *The Breakdown*, what might be the same man sits in the chair which rotates and multiplies into the infinity of that 'hyperspace' of the TV screen, that void between the production moment to its flickering presence in the atomised space of the living room. Such 'indeterminate' qualities are what theoretically and aesthetically retrieve **Not Necessarily** from limited effect. *Malcolm Dickson*



